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LONGMAN'S MAGAZINE.

NOVEMBER 1900.

*One of Ourselves.*¹

BY L. B. WALFORD,
AUTHOR OF 'MR. SMITH,' &c.

CHAPTER XXIX.

'PRISCILLA PUTS US ALL TO SHAME.'

'HUMPH! I thought as much.'

Mr. Thomas Farrell surveyed with a grim contortion of the muscles his own carriage drive deeply indented with wheel-marks. Not only did they interlace each other all the way up from the lodge gates, but the gravel sweep in front of the house was almost torn to a rut from the protracted circling round and round of vehicles.

'They have been here, every man-Jack of them; but they're gone by now, I suppose?' he hesitated and considered. Was it possible that, though the full tide had ebbed away, any sediment still remained? Not while a single Farrell was in the house would he enter it.

All being quiet, however, he cautiously stepped within. Aye, they were gone; but they had assuredly been there; the drawing-room door stood open, and by the look of the room, by its very atmosphere he could picture the scene or the succession of scenes which had been there enacted. Cousin Matilda in the big arm-chair, Maud and Mildred ('They'd both of them come to-day, though they're none so keen on Prilly's company at other times,' muttered he)—the sofa and ottoman would afford perches for them.

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Emma would be well in the middle of the party, as near her dear Priscilla, the fountain-head, as she could get. The Meredith Farrells, the Alfred Farrells, Cynthia Farrell, who only turned up from afar on great occasions—like vultures they must have gathered together now. ‘All of ’em at poor Prilly at once!’ quoth he, and poor Prilly appearing at the moment, he eyed her half compassionately, half sardonically. ‘You’ve had a fine assemblage, I see,’ pointing to the chairs as he spoke.

‘Oh, my dear Thomas, yes.’

Most unlike Mrs. Tom was that worn-out, over-burdened sigh. As a rule, a Farrell afternoon left her as brisk as a bee, full of everybody’s dear concerns, and ready to retail them—nothing too minute to be descanted upon, from the wonderful lace which was Matilda’s latest bargain to the new food which did not suit Emma’s baby—but now it seemed she had not a word to say.

‘Down on him like a load of bricks, I suppose?’ propounded Thomas, who really wished to hear. It was the day after the bank exposure.

She signified assent.

‘Well?’

No response.

‘Can’t you sit down?’ cried he at last, oppressed by her disconsolate movements and unwonted reticence. ‘Let those things alone,’ for she was carrying empty tea-cups back to the table. ‘What’s the use of wearing yourself out? We knew it had to come. Sit down, Prilly,’ he added more gently, and seated himself, pulling out his handkerchief to blow his nose. It seemed a long time since the morning of the day before, and the first shock had passed; he might as well learn what others were saying about it.

‘I really think Emma—I really was shocked at Emma.’ With a flush on her cheek, his wife found voice at last.

‘Emma? Well? Emma?’ He pricked up his ears, recalling the little brush he and Charles had had about Emma in the bank parlour.

‘You know, Thomas, I have often felt that poor Emma—that her sense of right and wrong—but to-day she might have been a perfect heathen! All she thought of was the money, and how dreadful it would be if none of it could be recovered. Charles could ill afford his share of the loss, I heard her saying; and that it was so hard it should have fallen upon them just when something else had gone wrong.’

‘She needn’t talk. Something else has been going wrong with

Charles all his life. If he had been left to himself he would have been bankrupt before now. What had she to say about—the other thing?’

‘Oh, my dear Thomas, that was the worst. I don’t believe Emma feels as we do about that at all; no, I do not believe she does. Of course, she said a great deal more than any of us; it was terrible to hear her using the plainest, coarsest terms——’

‘Just what she would do.’

‘Matilda rose and called away Maud, who had got wedged in upon the ottoman between Emma and little Aggie. Seeing her do that, I took away Aggie; I could not bear those girls to hear——’

‘Didn’t I tell you what Charles said? She’s a deal too knowing is that Emma.’

‘She seemed quite to *like* to talk of it. I did what I could, and I must say Matilda backed me up—I fancy Matilda had hoped to find me alone, and, of course, before her dear girls we would not have alluded to—the worst; but there was no keeping Emma quiet, nor Cynthia.’

‘Oh, she was in the thick of it, too? Of course. An old maid.

‘Thomas, I could not have believed that in our drawing-room and about one of ourselves such things *could* have been said. Oh, Thomas, it was like a nightmare. I had been praying to God for help to bear it, to forgive me my share in it—my own wilful, wicked share in it——’

‘No, no; come, come; I don’t see that.’

‘I shall see it to my dying day;’ she wrung her hands, and her eyes filled afresh. ‘What right had I to press him on? To plot and plan and arrange? God knows I thought him an honest man; I thought——’

‘We all know what you thought of him, my dear,’ dryly. ‘If a second Lucifer could have fallen from Heaven—poor Prilly!’ he broke off short. ‘One of the first things I thought of was how awful this would be to you. I said to Charles, “It will half kill Priscilla.”’

Priscilla fell on her knees beside his arm-chair.

‘Dear Thomas, is there any hope?’ She hid her face, her poor little yellow-red face, in her hands as she put the question.

‘You mean for the girl?’ he breathed above her ear. ‘I’m afraid not; nothing is certain, of course; but we have found out thus much. He sailed from Liverpool on Wednesday in last week, as Macmillan surmised; we have got a list of the passengers by

the *Majestic* on that day, and have pretty well identified them as a Mr. and Mrs. Gray who took tickets—at least, he did—only two days before. 'There is only one thing,' he hesitated, and she looked up eagerly. 'You know about the complication?'

'Complication, dear Thomas?'

'Pshaw! the other woman. I thought you did not like plain terms,' irritably.

'Oh?' Priscilla's head sank down again.

'We can't place her, and as the others must have gone straight to the boat, supposing she were there before them, there might be the devil to pay.'

Again she looked bewildered.

'Don't you see, ma'am? This person is supposed to be William's wife. Would she stand another wife, or—anything of the kind?'

'And if she were to prevent it,' a sudden thrill of hope; 'is that what you would say, Thomas? She might prevent it; she might step in and——'

'She might. There's a bare chance. But it's so bare that I would not give a twopenny damn for it,' muttered he to himself, as Priscilla stole away—he felt, to prayer. 'It is he who has demoralised us all,' testy with himself, for 'twopenny damns' had not hitherto been in his vocabulary. 'I can't think of him in ordinary language. All these years!' he paused, and drew a breath that whistled between his lips; 'all these years!'

Let us now take a peep at Stephen Farrell and his wife. All the Farrell men had gone straight to their consorts, as was the family habit when anything of import, whether for weal or woe, had happened; and Stephen, albeit not so entirely submerged in domesticity as some, had a good opinion of his Matilda, too.

'Where is your mother, girls?'

She was alone, and his tongue could have free run, ending with: 'Poor old Tom! I declare he gave us a fright. I thought he would have had a stroke or something. It was awful to see him rolling his eyes round and round, and as helpless as a child. Kept appealing to me. I—it was a shock to me, but of course to *them*! Charles simply looked a little more stupid than usual; though, poor fellow, I daresay he felt it, too,' relenting, 'considering the blind faith he and Tom have had in Billy all their lives; even Macmillan was shaking all over, and he didn't know the whole.'

'It must have been terrible, Stephen.'

'Terrible? It seemed incredible. Even now I can't take it

in. When old Mac began about having summoned us because of some grave crisis in the bank affairs, I—and the others, too—kept looking round for Billy; Thomas tried to stop Mac by saying we would wait for Mr. William, although Mac had begun by giving us the hint that we were all there. When young Colvin came in, by that time we were so strung up that we—I, at any rate, was prepared for anything;’ and he poured forth anew.

‘I must go to Beech Hall to-morrow,’ said she, at the close of the conference.

‘They will expect you. Thomas said something about it, though I daresay he hardly knew what he was saying. His wits were quite scattered, poor old chap; and I fancy that worst of all was the thought of telling Priscilla.’

The next day it was: ‘Well, and what about Priscilla? How did you find her? What had she to say for herself?’

‘She had nothing to say for herself!’

‘Nothing? What d’ye mean?’ sharply.

‘I mean that I always did blame Priscilla for her absurd match-making tendencies. But for them we should never have had that odious little Emma among us; and never was Emma more thoroughly objectionable than to-day. But Priscilla——’ The speaker drew off her feathered boa and laid it aside, gaining time by the manœuvre.

‘Disarmed criticism, did she? Is that what you mean? She did set that affair a-going, you know. You said so yourself. You said it that day when she had you to meet the Colvin girls.’

‘She is feeling it bitterly, Stephen. No one could feel it more.’

‘It wasn’t as if they were a family like ours,’ pursued he. ‘She should have been more careful—no mother, nor anybody.’

‘I assure you that is what Priscilla herself says.’

‘Well, she ought.’ He had been getting up the case against her in his mind, and found it amplified on reflection. ‘She has a great deal to answer for,’ he resumed, doggedly.

‘She will never get over it, Stephen; no, I do not believe Priscilla will ever get over it. You know what she thinks of your people? That there are none like them on the face of the earth; that it is an honour to any man or woman, no matter whom, to be connected with the Farrells; that Farrell is a name to conjure with——’

‘It will be all we can do to conjure it out of the newspapers.

If anyone had told me we should be banded together to shield a common thief and bigamist——! Good Lord! it makes me hot and cold to think of what we might have had to go through supposing Macmillan is right, and supposing that the other fellow is right who came in to-day—a friend of Billy's, whom we were obliged to take into confidence, and who asserts that Billy told him he was going to be married and go to America for his honeymoon. It seems to have amused our playful cousin to tell the truth on all sides, and let it fall as harmlessly as summer lightning. He told Macmillan he was going to the Isle of Wight; he told a friend of Lionel Colvin's he was going on to Liverpool after a stoppage in the Midlands; he told his own friend he was going to be married. A fine story the whole would make for the columns of the "Evening News." I don't think Priscilla would be so proud of the name of Farrell once she saw it heading that paragraph. I suppose that is what she is thinking of.

'You are unjust to her. That is *not* what she is thinking of.'

'They have not told her all, then?'

'Thomas told her what you told me. I confess that I, like you, shrank from the idea of publicity—that it was so terrible to me as almost to overpower every other thought. Stephen, Priscilla puts us both to shame. With all her reverence for the family honour and devotion to its interest, these things are nothing to her now. The loss of money is nothing, the scandal is nothing——'

'Something is something, I suppose?' gruffly.

'Priscilla would beggar herself to-morrow, would bear the obloquy of the whole world upon her shoulders, if by so doing she could save a hair of that poor child's head.'

He started, and looked at her attentively. Gradually his eyes fell, and there rose before his vision another scene: a sunny little room, with roses blowing through the open window, and within, a blushing maiden smiling upon her supposed lover. A fresh act of the old, old play. Youth and Love once more met to perform their pretty parts.

He passed his hand across his brow. When he spoke again it was to exclaim, almost inaudibly:

'She is right! God forgive us, Priscilla is right!'

To his surprise a hand was laid on his shoulder, and the stately woman stood there with glistening eyes. Without a word they kissed each other and separated.

We need not recapitulate further conversation of this kind; it is not necessary to know what this one said and that one thought, who talked and who held their peace, who burned with shame and who carried themselves unblushingly upright.

Among the latter, we may be sure, was Mrs. Charles Farrell. *She* had done no harm; for what should she hang her head?

'The sin of one is the sin of all,' murmured Mrs. Tom, miserably.

'Good gracious!' Emma could not see that by any manner of means.

'At least we share the disgrace,' pleaded her sister-in-law.

'You may, if you choose,' retorted the other. 'I don't.'

'Emma, you are not going to that ball?' in accents that were absolutely stern.

'Indeed I am,' quoth Emma, shrilly. 'Not go to a ball a fortnight hence! What nonsense! Excuse my saying so, Priscilla, but you really go so little in the world' (picked up at Cromer), 'that you have some quite ridiculously out-of-date ideas. To expect that one should shut oneself up as if one were in mourning! Even as it is, hardly any people know about it, and in a few weeks it will have blown over completely. My friends would think I was crazy if I said I was going nowhere because Charles's brother had come to grief. That sort of thing is as common as ditch-water in high life, and they make no fuss——'

She paused on perceiving that Priscilla was regarding her with such a look of scorn and mistrust as no one could have believed Priscilla's meek little features capable of wearing.

Now she would gladly have eaten her words, for to explain them away was beyond her. Beforehand Priscilla had been aroused and suspicious; the above betrayed the real Emma beyond hope of redemption. Never from that hour was she 'dear Emma' again.

Three days later, however, behold Mrs. Tom with a different expression on her face! And what in the world is Mrs. Tom doing scudding along the highway on a cold, dark, autumnal afternoon, battling with a fierce head wind, and thrusting herself, as it were, into its very teeth? It may be doubted whether she has ever been found on foot so far from her own doorstep before. She is not a person who requires exercise for its own sake, and she is always so busy, has such a multiplicity of interests (within her own circle) that the big carriage, slowly as it goes, is invariably

in requisition when anything has to be done without the precincts of Beech Hall.

But fat John has received no orders on this occasion, and neither he nor anyone else knows of this daring escapade. Priscilla has even donned her hat and cloak by stealth, crept from the porch and spun down the drive by stealth, keeps her head down as she slips through the side door of the entrance gate, and tears along the road.

'Who can that be?' murmurs one of two figures seated in the window of the Colvins' little drawing-room. 'Get back, Poll. Whoever it is, don't let us be seen,' and the two hastily retreat backwards.

'We told Simmins to let no one in,' whispered Poll, as a minute later the door-bell sounds.

'Simmins is such an idiot,' Georgie frowns, uneasily.

Both wish they had been upstairs where they would have felt safer; the drawing-room is too near the seat of action, even if Simmins is faithful; and supposing he should have imagined his young ladies in their usual retreat, and supposing the visitor, whoever it be, should prevail and force an entrance? Hark, there is the pantry door swinging—it has a creak which the lazy old fellow never oils—and now his shuffle along the passage—he is probably putting on his coat as he goes—their ears are on the stretch for what is to follow.

A murmur of voices comes through the open doorway behind which the girls are crouching, and ere they have time to do more than exchange a glance of wrath and despair their citadel has been stormed and they are in the hands of the enemy. In other words, Mrs. Tom is before them.

Mrs. Tom, alone, unannounced, unabashed as it seems, for indeed she is so out of herself that every sense is lost in one prevailing, enveloping emotion—Mrs. Tom, we say, bursts in regardless of opposition, strenuous as Simmins had tried to make it (she would not have heeded an army of fifty thousand horse and foot), and they are at her mercy.

Has she gone crazed? Georgie notes with a kind of inward shriek that her hat is wrong side foremost, and her hands are bare. A lock of hair straggles behind her ear.

And this is the neatest, primmest woman in the neighbourhood!

For a single moment she stands still, gasping, her prey unperceived—the next, her eye is upon them. 'Oh!' she cries and falls upon the floor, having fainted straight away. . . .

'Please don't rise, dear Mrs. Tom; it is only Poll and me.' Poll and Georgie, very much frightened and entirely disarmed, are kneeling by the sofa on which they have laid the unconscious lady, and now that she has opened her eyes and the colour is returning to her cheek they have sent away Simmins and the brandy bottle, and are rubbing hands and feet with the most industrious assiduity.

'What did you say, please?' Georgie, who is nearest the speaker's lips, bends down to catch the broken murmur.

'Is it—is it——?'

'Don't try to speak yet. Poll, just raise this pillow. Wrap the feet in the shawl, and come here. If you will let us draw you up a very little,' in a regular nursing accent Georgie bends over the patient, 'we won't shake you, and I think it would be more comfortable.'

'Where—where am I?' But on a sudden she is all herself again. 'Oh, my dears, my dears, forgive me, but I could not stay, I could not wait an instant after I heard. I felt I must come; I *must*. Is it—is it—true?'

They looked at each other. 'She means has Bet been found?' said Poll, in a low voice.

'Yes—yes,' said Mrs. Tom, wildly. Her hands clasped as she spoke.

'Lionel has seen her. She is safe—but——' A look of agony dispelled their last shade of resentment. 'She is still very ill,' said Georgie, gravely, 'and they cannot say that she is quite out of danger yet.'

'Where—is she?'

'In Liverpool. She was stopped in time. Do you understand, dear Mrs. Tom?—in time. They never went to the registrar's office. Another person who has been his wife for some years——'

'And Bet is saved! Oh God, I thank Thee—I thank Thee!' A flood of tears. For some minutes all wept in company.

It was Poll who first dried her eyes and took upon herself the task of narrator.

'We only heard last night,' she said. 'We stayed in London, Georgie and I; Lionel brought her up from King's Beacon the day before, and he went to Liverpool by the first train in the morning. It was at King's Beacon he heard—it was so strange, he heard through a cousin—a cousin we have hardly ever seen. But Lionel met our uncle, Lord Umfreville, going down——'

'Poll, you had better let me. I don't think Mrs. Tom quite understands you.'

Poll meekly drew back.

'When Lionel came down to King's Beacon, the Massiturs' place where I was staying,' proceeded Georgie, for she perceived that its name had carried no information, and that all was still bewilderment, though their auditor could not interrupt and was still feebly weeping, 'would you rather wait a little?' she broke off.

'No, no; dear, kind girls, do tell me, do forgive me——'

'But you are sure it will not make you ill again?'

'*Me* ill?' (Her tone said, 'As if that mattered!') 'Indeed, indeed, I am longing to hear——' and again a low breath of thanksgiving.

'Lionel thought himself obliged to tell our uncle, as the head of the family, what had happened. It was such a blessing he did. Our uncle told the other Umfrevilles who were stopping with him, and one of them turned out to have been seeing the steamer off by which they—by which Bet——' faltering.

'Yes—yes?'

'He had noticed her, though he did not know who she was. He had seen her left behind; she dropped her bag on the station platform, and our cousin took it to the station-master, and noticed her initials on it. Directly he heard uncle Umfreville's story, he felt sure it was Bet's, and that she was somewhere—by herself. He came over to find Lionel and tell him. And oh, Mrs. Tom, it *was* Bet's bag, and Lionel went at once to the police station, and found information had been given a week ago, on the same night, about a lost girl——'

'That lost girl was our Bet,' speaking quickly, for fear of being again unable to proceed, Georgie resumed; 'she had got far, far away from the landing-stage, no one knows how; they suppose she had just run on and on, and at last fallen down on the road, and it was close to a house, and they saw her, and took her in——'

'Wonderful—wonderful!'

'And they have been so kind. She has been nursed and watched—but she was quite delirious, and so of course they could not tell who she was or where to send. Only her clothes were marked, and so directly Lionel went to the station he was told where to go. He says the police had advertised, but of course no

one in Liverpool knew about it; and there we were searching in the Isle of Wight—you know what we thought?—we never dreamed of looking in Liverpool, because we only found out about her having gone there on Wednesday, and then——’

‘Yes, yes; I know. Oh, my poor children—my poor children.’

‘Lionel said he would go to the bank this morning,’ said Poll, softly. ‘That was how you heard, wasn’t it?’

‘My dear husband sent a messenger out. He knew what it would be to me;’ she did not add that she had hardly eaten or drunk for days, and had spent most of her nights in prayer. ‘I did not know if I should find you here, but I felt I must try. Your man said you had only just arrived.’

‘We came this morning.’

Mrs. Tom was now sitting upright, looking about for her accoutrements. ‘And her poor little nose looked like a shiny red pebble left by the sea,’ said Georgie, afterwards. ‘Whenever I think of Mrs. Tom I shall remember her as she was to-day. If her hat was wrong side foremost, it was because her heart was upside down.’

They arrayed her for departure with tender hands, and as she would not hear of going back otherwise than as she came, neither would they hear of her going back without an escort.

‘We made her stop a long time—long time, Lionel, till she was quite able to go—at least as able as she would ever be—and when she had had tea, and it was a little darker, for we did not want to be seen, Poll and I took her back. She begged and entreated us not, but we would. We had not meant to go outside our gate as long as we remained at The Nook, but we could not let that good, kind creature paddle off by herself——’

‘Certainly not,’ said he.

‘Have you done anything about The Nook, Lionel?’ they adventured presently.

‘I have put it in the agent’s hands.’

‘And—and you have written to Lady Blanche?’

‘I wrote yesterday.’

CHAPTER XXX.

A QUIET HAVEN.

WE have had so much of tears and trouble that it is quite a relief to turn to a little chamber where all is busy cheerfulness, and where the sunshine of a bright sky without is responded to by the sunshine of light hearts within.

That room has seen its dark hours, it is true; has witnessed anxious faces and smothered footfalls; but now all is going well, doctor and nurse smile at each other, and a little white face upon the pillow over which they bend smiles at them both.

Bet knows all about it now. Not quite all perhaps, but enough to let her lie peacefully still when she is not eating or sleeping or being bustled about by her attendants. They tell her bits of news, what the weather is like, who sent the last greenhouse posy for her flower table, who inquired at the door. There is another sick girl whom the doctor visits on the same round as when he comes to Holly Lodge, and Bet never fails to inquire how this girl is and what she is doing. The mind works feebly within a given and limited space, but gains in clearness and strength every day.

There is a sleek tabby-cat who walks in and settles himself before the fire. Bet asks for him to be lifted up by the bedside for her to stroke and fondle.

She gets her letters, and hoards them under her pillow, liking to feel they are there, though she does not read them often. They are very simple letters, such as would be addressed to a child.

Presently the day comes when she is to get up for the first time—a most important event. Although it is so cold outside, no one would guess as much in the genial atmosphere of this warmly curtained, sweet-scented room, into which no draught ever penetrates. A big arm-chair is wheeled round into the chimney corner, and a tall screen drawn round it. Dressing-gown and slippers are toasting in front of the blaze, and a whole array of other garments which have not hitherto made their appearance are being extracted from wardrobe and drawers. Bet watches the proceeding with lively interest.

She must have her soup before a move is made, however; and though it is only two hours since breakfast, the sight of a steaming

bowl makes her hungry at once. 'Oh, is it all gone?' Nurse delightedly whisks away the empty tray, announcing the while what there is to be for luncheon and what for dinner. The doctor is ordering all sorts of good things now.

Very deliberately and methodically the *grande toilette* is made, and the tottering little feet helped down to the floor, where they feel so odd and funny that nurse all but carries her patient across the carpet to the big chair. Once there, however, and all her goods and chattels round her, Bet shares the triumph which beams on the other's face, and, having been secretly a little afraid of the whole thing, sinks back with relief into her new nest.

'Now I am going to do your hair,' suggests nurse, after a time. 'I want to give it a good brushing. We must get it to look nice and glossy before the sisters come. Won't they laugh at you when they see it cut short? I expect they will make fun of these nice little curls instead of the long tails.'

'You have kept them, nurse?'

'Quite safe, with the other things.'

'When do you think I shall be able to be moved?'

'Oh, very soon now. Are you in a tremendous hurry?'

'It's not that I want to go,' says Bet, very earnestly; 'don't think it is that I am impatient to leave this kind, kind roof where you are all so good to me—far, far too good to me,' a sigh escaping, 'but——'

'Now, Miss Bet, you know what you promised, and you are going to be a good child and think of nothing but just how to get well and strong. Sick folks mustn't worry themselves; and if you begin to fret we shall have the doctor so cross and the old gentleman so disappointed. You should have seen how pleased he was this morning when he heard of your good night, and that you were to be up to-day. You chose the right place to be taken ill at, you poor little thing; and as for your being a trouble, Mr. Croozie says it's a sheer delight to him. Croozie, an odd name, isn't it?'

'He found me himself, didn't he?' She has been told so several times, but always puts the question again.

'Found you himself down by the gate. You must have had this fever upon you, and run off from your friends, not knowing what you were doing; you'll tell us about it some day; don't try now.'

'They did not discover me for about a week?'

'A week, was it? I daresay; I didn't come till the next

afternoon, as I was out when the message came to the hospital, and there was only Nurse Millington ready—we two were together here for the first fortnight, you know—but it must have been a week or thereabouts when your brother came after you. Poor young gentleman, nothing would serve him but he must see you to be sure that it was *you*. I expect he had been looking everywhere.'

'And he came in here—into this very room?'

'And stood by the bed looking down at you.'

'Was I asleep?'

'Not exactly,' said the nurse, quickly. 'Now, don't you think you have talked enough? Rest yourself awhile till I clear up, and then I'll read to you. Mr. Croozie has sent up a whole bundle of new magazines.'

Nothing further was to be obtained from her, and, happily for Bet, she herself could only recall the past with shadowy indistinctness. The shock her system had sustained on the discovery of her lover's perfidy, together with despair at finding herself bereft at one fell stroke of all for which she had suffered and struggled, just when the realisation seemed at hand, had so completely obscured her senses that what occurred between the terrible scene on the landing-stage and her awakening to find herself in the ministering hands of strangers, appeared in the retrospect only as a confused and hideous nightmare.

In reality she had fled from the spot, neither knowing nor caring where she went, conscious only of one overmastering desire—to hide herself.

There being nothing in her appearance to excite remark, it is probable that the fugitive traversed the busy docks unnoticed and unmolested for some distance; then turned off at a certain point and pursued a new direction through the crowded streets and thoroughfares of the city, following one which finally merged itself in a highway environed by suburban residences.

Passion and terror must have lent fictitious strength, for it was where these villas were fewer and more imposing in appearance, some miles away from streets and shops, that her worn-out frame must have succumbed at last, and fallen to the ground beneath a thick, overhanging hedge of holly, under which the hapless girl had possibly crept with some idea of shelter from the rain which had set in with the dusk.

The owner of Holly Lodge had returned from his usual business day at his office, and was about to turn in at his own gate,

when he stumbled against an obstacle, which on investigation proved to be the insensible form of a fellow-creature.

Old Mr. Croozie was at first disposed to proceed on his way with an emotion of disgust, but feelings of humanity prevailed. The unfortunate woman might be a drunkard, but she could hardly be abandoned to her fate on a cold, wet night, and there was no one near to whom he could consign her.

He peered closer. Perhaps he could induce the poor wretch to move on? Good Heavens! she was quite young, and fair to look upon. There was no breath of drink from her lips.

He took her by the arm and spoke to her. And now he heard her muttering to herself.

And then his eye took note of the decent clothing—not the clothing of a poor woman, still less of a tramp—and the truth began to dawn upon him.

Quickly summoning his servants, and disregarding their suspicions and objections, the excellent Croozie himself bore the unconscious form along in their midst—for he was the only man of the party, and, albeit seventy years of age, was stout and strong—and laid her down beneath the light of the hall lamp, where a swift examination was sufficient even for the least credulous.

Within an hour a doctor had confirmed the general opinion, and Bet, talking wildly, was laid, despite her feeble resistance, upon the bed from which she was not to rise for many a long day.

‘You are quite the Good Samaritan, my dear sir,’ quoth the doctor, blandly. ‘But for your promptitude there is no saying what the end might have been. I was not summoned a minute too soon, not a minute. The fever had firm hold upon her. Fought against, no doubt, as long as strength lasted, poor young thing. But now with youth on her side and all the care she is having—under such favourable conditions, in short, as your goodness has permitted (‘Which includes *my* attendance,’ mentally), ‘it is not unreasonable to hope for a complete and satisfactory recovery.’

For a whole week Bet had lain between life and death. She had barely emerged from that state, and the utmost vigilance was still necessary, when Lionel, acting on his cousin’s hint and following his directions, succeeded in tracing his sister through the medium of the police, with whom the worthy Croozie had communicated, and presented himself at the latter’s door.

Mr. Croozie was delighted to see him; could give him excellent news; everything was going on well in the sick-room, and as

for the part he had played in the affair, it was not worth mentioning. No one could have done more? Indeed, no one could have done less. He was glad and proud to have been the means. 'Carried her in myself,' said he chattily. 'No weight. What a fright you must have had!'

When Lionel wished to depart, such a thing was not to be allowed for a moment.

'Your room is ready, and I am looking forward to a companion for my lonely evening. Go to an hotel? Nothing of the kind. Besides, your sister may be better and able to recognise you in the morning. Oh, it is not thought desirable that you should see her again at present? Very good; we must obey orders, you know. But, at any rate, you will do me the favour to say no more about leaving to-night. I am sending into the town; your portmanteau can be fetched from the station; and any message or telegram——?'

Lionel owned that a telegram would be sufficient; he had not thought of returning south, only family anxiety must be relieved as quickly as possible.

When he rejoined Poll and Georgie on the following day, he could talk of nothing but Mr. Croozie. Mr. Croozie's house, pictures, books; Mr. Croozie's kindness, hospitality, agreeability; even Mr. Croozie's wines and cigars were dwelt upon, and the recital hearkened to with patient interest; but some little time afterwards, when attempting an evasion of an inconvenient subject, Lionel was thunderstruck by Georgie's response, 'Not Mr. Croozie this time.'

What did she mean? Mr. Croozie? What had Mr. Croozie to do with the subject in hand?

'We were ready to swallow him or anyone or anything you chose to palm off upon us that day when you returned from Liverpool,' said she; 'you did not want to talk about other things, so you just planted Mr. Croozie in front of you, and worked him for all he was worth; but it isn't fair to come it Mr. Croozie over us except on very state occasions, Lionel, and we can't allow it.'

Although Lionel did not judge it obligatory to confide more of Bet's history than the fact of her having sustained a mental shock supervening upon a period of trouble and distress, which, indeed, was sufficient to account for what had taken place, and stayed the mouths of all inquirers, medical authority decreed that it would be inadvisable to permit of any alteration in the sick-room routine till all danger of a relapse was past; and as nothing

was to be done to excite remembrance or recall former scenes to mind, he was obliged peremptorily to forbid the first and very natural impulse of the sisters to repair at once to Holly Lodge and take up their residence there.

‘When Mr. Croozie invited us, Lionel.’

‘Mr. Croozie did, but the doctor did not. On the contrary, he flatly forbade your going. For the present, he said. He would see how she went on, and send for you as soon as ever he could. Of course a doctor knows.’

‘I suppose so,’ dolefully. Georgie was the speaker.

He threw a glance of reproach. ‘What does it signify? She is safe. Safe, and when we think of what might have been!’

‘Oh yes, Lionel.’ Subdued, she stole away.

Time slipped along, and Bet scarcely noted the passage of his wings, but steadily and imperceptibly the sap mounted in her veins again. She ceased to lead a mere animal existence. When supposed to be sleeping she would be thinking. As her brain cleared, memory set to work, and detached scenes would be pieced together. She was often found in tears; sometimes she was heard in prayer.

And the world without seemed a long way off from that quiet chamber, with its leisure, tranquillity, and calm. She grew to know as friends the pictures on the walls; she was particular about the arrangement of her books and other effects; she had her fancies and aversions; she and her nurse had their jests. Below stairs there was Mr. Croozie, with his ceaseless small attentions. Bet grew quite eager to see Mr. Croozie at last.

It was a great day for all concerned when the old gentleman, very shy and pink, was ushered in, and found arrayed in all the panoply of state, a little wisp of a girl, looking so childlike in her white draperies, with her large, eager eyes fixed upon him, that he could scarcely believe this was the burden he had borne in from the autumn night, mentally designating it ‘a woman.’

Moreover, to his relief, Bet was no more shy of him than a child would have been. She was so pleased to have a visitor, so anxious he should be comfortable, and so charmed with the beautiful grapes and violets with which he had armed himself, that the overflow of gratitude and affection had no leaven of embarrassment, and when the visit was over he had promised to come every day, and to bring this and that (which he delighted to do)—so that the first excitement in the sick-room was pronounced by all concerned to be an unqualified success.

‘Only I don’t think I said enough,’ mused Bet, turning over her grapes and smelling her violets. ‘Did I say enough, Nurse?’ She was at the period when Nurse’s opinion was all in all.

Reassured on the point, she sat for a while very still, with clasped hands. Nurse, somewhat suspicious, approaching, beheld a tear steal down the pale cheek. ‘Now, now——!’ began she.

‘Oh, it is nothing,’ said the invalid, quickly. It was only that she had been saying to herself, ‘And I, who thought that God had forsaken me!’

The days passed and Bet began to long and pine for her own folks. What were they doing? When were they coming? Every word they wrote was pored over and pondered upon, and she rather wondered at their meagreness. Surely Georgie must know that away from them all, every item, even the smallest, would be of interest, yet Georgie’s epistles were felt to be even more inadequate than Poll’s. There was no lack of affection, indeed, expressions of endearment, sympathy, and tender inquiries filled the greater part of every sheet; but Bet was tired of herself, and would fain have seen some other personage occupy the platform.

She did not realise the difficulty of this. She could not know that poor Georgie hung over her blotting-book biting her pen in despair when nothing would come to her fit for Bet. There were such numbers of things that Bet must not be told, and so painfully few that she might, that ‘It has got to this, I have not a soul to write about but Simmins,’ cried she at last, and an anecdote of Simmins filled up a whole sheet.

Lady Blanche Massitur and Leonora were too far off to be of much service; the Farrells were perforce of none, and Lionel was quite sure that nothing ought to be said on a subject which was of paramount importance, but which for that very reason must be kept back.

The Nook was for sale, and negotiations with a likely purchaser were already taking shape.

‘We will not fix ourselves anywhere else without Bet’s having a say in it,’ decided Lionel, ‘and remember, she will be awfully sensitive——’

‘Oh, we know; Poll and I have thought of that,’ Georgie nodded at him. ‘We are not to be *too* good to her after the first. We are to shove her back into her old place, and make her bully us even if she doesn’t want to. We are not to appear as if—as if she had done anything——’

‘That’s it,’ said he, approving.

How much she had done, and to what extent his own happiness would be affected thereby, he had yet to learn. Nor would he expect to know in a hurry. The miserable affair had been so public—within a certain radius—that it was quite on the cards Lady Blanche might still consider her duty towards her charge precluded the idea of a connection with the family, even while permitting friendly intercourse to be uninterrupted, and often he did not know what to think. It came to this: the future was not hopeless, and he had learned from a long and bitter experience what patience meant.

The first snow lay upon the ground, and all the holly trees in Mr. Croozie’s garden were glittering in the shade or dripping in the sun, when one December afternoon a station fly drove to the door, and Bet, who was entrenched in the library, revelling in change of scene and solitude (having despatched her nurse on a message), was excited by the unusual apparition which was visible from a side window. Who could it be? Mr. Croozie had no visitors in the daytime, and no one would come to see her. Poll and Georgie were not expected till the following day; but, oh dear, suppose there had been some mistake, and they had arrived, and their rooms were not ready, and Mr. Croozie would be taken by surprise! She could scarcely feel the joy of seeing them for fear of their having done the wrong thing—a sure sign that Bet was coming to herself.

Clang went the deep-toned doorbell a second time. Mr. Croozie’s parlourmaid was not going to hurry herself, arguing that it was probably some one who had come to the wrong house and could therefore very well wait till she was ready to point out the right one.

But Bet, who could see nothing beyond the horse, the flyman on the doorstep, and the front part of the cab, and whose vision was, it will thus be seen, curtailed at its most desirable point, did not feel as though any such tame conclusion of the episode were likely. She was on her feet, starting and staring, when Lady Blanche Massitur was announced.

In a moment she was clasped in arms that might have been a mother’s.

‘But now, my darling,’ quoth the kind creature, having allowed a few moments for the natural outburst, ‘now we are going to be good and quiet, and talk over the little matter which brings me here. I am afraid it will be rather a disappointment to you, Bet.’

How easily and simply she spoke, just as if nothing had happened, and Bet were in her own home and she herself an afternoon caller. 'Don't look frightened,' she smiled encouragingly, 'it is only that those tiresome little sisters have gone and caught cold—influenza I believe it is, or some stupid attempt at it—they are not in the least ill, but of course it stops their coming here, so I have arranged a little plan instead,' stroking the pale cheek tenderly. 'Such a charming little plan, which Lionel approves of, which we *all* approve of, and which only awaits your sanction. Nothing can be done at The Nook without Bet's sanction, you know,' the speaker ran on lightly, affecting to see nothing and feel nothing, 'and so I took my courage in both hands, and here I am to try my luck. Will you all come and spend Christmas at King's Beacon? There, it's out!' Lady Blanche laughed, and continued, 'May I carry you off there—not to-day, dear, but on my return to this neighbourhood early next week, by which time Poll and Georgie will be with Leonora ready to receive us? Lionel will come down on Christmas Eve.'

'And you came here—all this way—for *me*?'

'Can't let influenza patients run about carrying infection——'

'But they are to run to King's Beacon. Oh, Lady Blanche, you can't deceive me, I see it all. And for *me*!' Again her head sank upon her bosom.

'Bet, you are the same to me as my own child. My child has gone through a terrible ordeal—we will not talk of it now; the day will come when we shall have no secrets from each other, but for the present let it suffice that there is nothing but unbated love and trust between us. My home is yours; will you come to it?'

'Will I?' It was the one desire of her heart, and she had told herself it would never be fulfilled.

A word aside to our readers on this point.

Lady Blanche, hearing of the unlucky illness at The Nook, and Lady Blanche retailing the same within the library at Holly Lodge, were two different persons.

'The very thing!' she had exclaimed triumphantly, on reading aloud Georgie's doleful epistle. 'What could be more *à propos*? I could not imagine how we were to keep back those girls, now that Bet's provoking doctor says she is fit to have them, and her still more provoking old Croozie man sends word they are to come. And how would it be possible to keep the whole story from leaking out, once Poll and Georgie were at the mercy of a clever nurse

and servants brimful of curiosity? They might start by being reserved, but Georgie at least would never be able to keep it up. Now *I* go and do the civil; I put all straight with the good Croozie; he shall be invited here to make up to him and can come in the spring—for Easter, if that suits him—and I prepare Bet. Then I take the opportunity of giving Janet a few days' (Janet was a Lancashire cousin, seldom visited), and return for Bet early in the week, by which time Leonora can have her little party assembled here. Most excellent influenza, I do bless thee!' the lively lady wound up, and flew to her desk.

Lionel had to be communicated with, but Lionel's reply can be imagined for ourselves.

Having managed him it will readily be understood that her ladyship found an easy prey in Bet's praiseworthy benefactor. Mr. Croozie was certainly at first a little disappointed, for he had so entered into the spirit of the thing that he was quite looking forward to the advent of his youthful guests, but to be sure the honour of entertaining so great a lady and so charming a woman as Lady Blanche Massitur, went a long way towards compensation.

Lady Blanche, perceiving the manner of man she had to deal with, while not actually begging for a bed at Holly Lodge, so obviously showed her host the way to offer it that he kindled and glowed beneath her touch.

Ha, indeed? Who would laugh at him and his poor little waif now? It would be his turn to watch the faces of his intimates when they heard that he was entertaining as one of the waif's friends—one who had come a long way too, on purpose to escort her back to her home—a lady of rank.

And he, Benjamin Croozie, was engaged to spend his Easter holiday at this lady of rank's house!

Benjamin was a simple creature, and, to own the truth at once, he was a great deal better pleased than if the Queen herself had sent for him. His back, as he handed Lady Blanche into her cab, was a sight to see. Ages afterwards Bet told Poll and Georgie about it. This was sign number two that Bet was coming to herself again.

CHAPTER XXXI.

CONCLUSION.

SHARP against the darkening wintry sky stood out the great walls and turrets of King's Beacon. Straight up into the frosty air rose the smoke of its many chimneys. Lights sprang up, and forms flitted across the windows, which were being closed and shuttered for the night in all directions. A carriage was rolling rapidly along the central avenue.

Within doors three young girls were assembled in a stately bedchamber on the ground floor, giving it the finishing touches of preparation for an expected guest.

It was a vast and solemnly panoplied apartment, with sofas, screens, wardrobes, and huge four-poster all on a scale of old-fashioned splendour that might have been felt by some too oppressive for everyday comfort; but Georgie loved the room and was sure Bet would, so that Lady Blanche's instructions to make ready the blue room had been hearkened to delightedly, despite Leonora's hesitation.

Leonora, had the choice been left to her, would have pitched upon some little nutshell, snug and bright, where one could see everything at a glance, and have every convenience within arm's length. She laughed a little, and wondered a little when it was obvious that the other's fancy revelled in the spaciousness of her new quarters, and that as she hastened to assign all that was best to Bet, and efface her own modest belongings in the least accessible drawers and shelves, she found even the height of the bed and the necessity for mounting it by aid of steps, enchanting. Leonora was secretly amused, but deprecating.

'Of course it looks comfortable,' acknowledged she; 'and you must be sure always to keep up an enormous fire, and the sun is at this side of the house in the mornings. I suppose Auntie thought of that.'

'She thinks of everything,' cried Georgie, enthusiastically; 'and she knew we should love this great *homey* room, with its old prints and mirrors, and this wonderful carpet, and all the tables. You know Bet will have to be a good deal in here; she will lie on this great sofa, and you and Poll and I—what is it, Poll?' for Poll rushed in at the moment.

'The carriage!' panted she, breathlessly.

'The carriage?' echoed Georgie, and stood still, the eyelids sinking over her eyes. A shiver ran down her frame.

'Come,' cried Poll, seizing her. 'What is the matter? Oh, Georgie, don't,' indignantly. 'Remember what Lady Blanche said. Georgie, you *must*.'

'Yes, yes. It was only what if she shouldn't be there? Leonora—Poll,' she clung to them both. 'Will Bet really be there? Will she? Are you sure?'

'Don't be silly,' said Poll, sturdily. 'If you are going to behave like that——' Then lower, 'Think of *her*. You know how she will feel.'

It was Georgie who was first at the hall-door.

'Now, dears, carry her off; carry her off,' Lady Blanche's pleasant voice rose above the din and bustle of welcome. 'Off with you three to your own haunt. You got my letter, and the blue room is ready, and her tea there? That's right; away with you then,' waving her hand with sovereign authority. 'You are to have Bet to yourselves till dinner-time. Don't tear her in pieces, that's all I ask; we shall demand to see her sound and whole when we look you up by-and-bye. Leonora must put up with her old auntie for the present,' drawing her niece's arm affectionately through hers, and turning off in another direction as the three little birds, the three dear little birds, vanished down the passage.

'She has been dreading this moment,' continued the speaker, settling down with a sigh of relief. 'I think we have all been dreading it; but you behaved beautifully, dear Leonora, and indeed, we all acquitted ourselves fairly well. They will cry and laugh together now, and being so used to one another and to having no secrets from each other, they will soon be as happy as possible. Dear children!' very softly.

'Auntie,' Leonora on her knees by the side of the chair, 'I can hardly believe it has all come right like this.'

'Nor I. We little thought it ever could; but there is a Hand above steering our little boats through storm and swell, and through this awful experience may we learn more fully our weakness and His strength. Bet,' continued Lady Blanche, slowly, 'is greatly changed. Doubtless she needed some great humiliation to lower her self-confidence, as well as some scathing ordeal to call into being all the inherent nobility of her nature. Just such an ordeal as she has undergone, in short. The shock, the terror, the frightful imminence of her peril—no wonder she nearly gave way beneath it all, and I fancy she is often living it over again when

by herself. One would not wish it otherwise. She must suffer and continue to suffer ; but she will rise purified and exalted from these depths. We shall see her beautiful in mind as in person—her father's daughter——'

'And a daughter to you,' whispered Leonora, for there was a great, great secret between these two, and Leonora did not grudge loving epithets and prognostications, nor was Lady Blanche as careful in giving them rein as she might have been but for this private understanding.

She now proceeded more briskly : 'Yes, if that little plan comes off, Leonora, I shall gain three daughters instead of one. I don't think any objection will be raised, do you? Of course, nothing can be said, and no hint transpire till after someone else has spoken ; but we know how he feels, and it is only a very short time to wait. This day week we are to expect Lionel. Nothing more natural than that he should come down on Christmas Eve, and if he chances to encounter his uncle a second time—eh, Leonora?'

Towards the close of a couple of hours, there was a rustle outside the door of the blue bedchamber, and a tap was followed by instant admission.

'Here we are!' cried Georgie, running up to the visitors, and wheeling round chairs with alacrity. 'She has been lying down while we unpacked for her. Doesn't she look little in that big sofa? Leonora, she says this is the delightfulest room she ever was in in her life.'

'And not too tired, my darling?' inquired Lady Blanche, fondly. Bet was not in the least too tired, just nicely tired, pleasantly tired, and so glad to see them. They sat around her till the dressing-gong sounded, when an elderly, motherly looking woman appeared, into whose hands she was consigned to be put to bed.

'Mrs. Hale is quite your own, and she has promised to be very careful of you,' quoth Lady Blanche, kissing 'Goodnight,' and though Georgie had settled it with herself that she was going to be nurse (for of course she was quick enough to understand why it was as well to leave Bet's former attendant behind, and thus sever all connections between past and present in that line), she took at once to the idea of 'a kind of a maid,' as she inwardly designated the newcomer.

When she came back after dinner, Mrs. Hale was sitting by the bed, and Bet was fast asleep within it. 'She asked me to stay with her, miss.'

'I thought she would,' said Lady Blanche, when she was told. 'But I know whose arm she will like to feel round her neck to-night,' and she smiled at Georgie tenderly.

Georgie drew nearer. 'She says she was always feeling and feeling for me when she was ill, and she used to shake the pillow and say "Wake up!"'—the speaker stopped abruptly. It had been all she could do to keep from bursting out crying when Bet with a smile told her this. Bet only thought it rather funny.

She seemed to have sunk all such trifles in one whirlpool. They did not affect her even in memory. Also she had abdicated her responsibilities. Once Poll and Georgie deliberately schemed to make her scold them. She only smiled indulgence.

Then they ran to Lady Blanche. 'It is too soon,' said she. She perceived that time was needed for the lost powers to reassemble. 'And I doubt if you will ever find Bet inclined to play the autocrat as once she did,' continued the lady. 'Dear Bet sees herself in too poor a light now—a blessed sight.'

So they all spoiled her, and she still remained humble. Every day she drove out with Leonora, and usually the sunny portion of the short December day was chosen; but on one occasion a stroll through the grounds before luncheon was substituted, and the pony cart ordered at three o'clock. This was on Christmas Eve.

'Because you might go the station way,' suggested Lady Blanche, 'and pick up Lionel, if you meet him. I told him we would send, but that if he preferred to walk——' She turned to Leonora, 'Just drive in that direction, my dear.' Aside, 'The meeting will be easier for Bet, you know.'

'There he is,' exclaimed Bet, espying a figure in the distance, after they had driven a mile or two.

'We thought we should meet you,' said Leonora, as she brought Punch and Judy to a standstill. 'What a beautiful afternoon! But you must have had a cold journey.'

'Getting quite well, are you, Bet?' said Lionel, in the same matter-of-fact tones. 'That's right. I hardly expected you would be out at this hour. It does not seem so cold here as it was in London, though. We had a fog there,' and in answer to a suggestion he jumped up behind.

'Well? You met him? And where is he?' demanded Lady Blanche, as only one of the three entered the drawing-room on the return of the party. 'You brought him up, I hope?' and her ladyship cast a glance at once merry and scrutinising on the countenance before her; but Bet only smiled in reply.

'Where are they, Bet?'

'I don't know indeed, Lady Blanche.'

'Did they not—ahem!—come into the house with you?'

'No. They turned off into the shrubbery,' continued Bet, with a little tremble in her voice. 'I think Lionel proposed it. Oh, Lady Blanche, is it—is it really—to be?'

'We shall see,' quoth her ladyship, oracularly.

Presently she despatched Bet for her usual rest before dinner, and desired Georgie to attend her sister.

'Poll can go too if she likes,' further dictated she; 'and don't be very much surprised if you should have a pair of visitors presently. They won't stay out *very* long, I dare say; and supposing there should be a piece of news to confide to three little sisters, Lionel would not know where to find them without Leonora's aid,' archly.

They flew to their retreat, there to wait in breathless but joyful suspense.

'I always said it would come right—I always did!' cried Georgie.

'But you never thought it,' amended Poll.

Bet sat in silence.

It was only from agitation, however, for when the expected footsteps were heard at last, and Leonora flew into the room, while Lionel stood still in the doorway, in the midst of the hubbub that ensued he felt the touch of lips upon his head. He took Bet in his arms and embraced her as a man and a brother should. 'Thank God!' he heard her whisper to herself.

'And we have brought you all in some flowers to wear—white flowers, for our sakes,' said Leonora. 'We cut them together,' taking the bunch from Lionel, who had carried it hitherto. 'Will you put on your best frocks? Yours is ready, Bet—oh, it is laid out for you? How pretty! I am going to wear my pearls, because we are all so happy.' Then, very softly in Bet's ear: 'Darling Bet, say you are happy too!'

'Indeed, indeed I am.'

'How long shall you take over your wine and cigarettes, Lionel?' inquired Lady Blanche, as she headed the ladies out after dinner. 'We are going to hurry you a little to-night, because a state council is about to be held, and you are forthwith elected a privy councillor. Shall we give you a quarter of an hour?'

'Not that if I am wanted, Lady Blanche.' He would have followed on the spot, but she put him back.

'No, no; come in a quarter of an hour. We have to arrange preliminaries, and what man does not enjoy his little smoke after dinner?' And she sailed away with her bevy.

When he appeared, true to time, he found the council assembled after this wise: his hostess on a sofa; Bet by her side (he thought Lady Blanche's arm was round Bet); Leonora and Georgie perched upon the fender stool; Poll, always rather the odd-man-out, occupying an ottoman in solitary state. He seated himself beside Pollkins.

It struck him that Lady Blanche was not quite herself—more nervous and restless than she had been at dinner, when talk had flowed freely and she had borne a prominent part in it. Although she had herself given notice of the conference, it was delayed at her instance until coffee had been handed round, and again until some messages between the drawing-room and the housekeeper's room had been transmitted.

He began to perceive that she was a little afraid of what she had to say.

Leonora, on her part, looked anxiously at her aunt once or twice; and the three sisters, plainly aware of something coming, for very expectation remained motionless and mute.

At length the plunge could no longer be avoided.

'I thought it best for us all to be together,' said Lady Blanche, looking round, 'because what I have to say affects us all, and we should like—Leonora and I, who are the promoters of the scheme—to have a general opinion of its merits before entering into particulars, which can be discussed later. As we are going to be one family——'

'Yes!' cried Georgie, irrepressibly, and squeezed Leonora's waist, then looked at Bet for rebuke, forgetting in the excitement of the moment that one would not be forthcoming.

Bet, forsooth, was smiling, and so was Lady Blanche. The artless interjection had relieved the tension, and set all more at ease.

'I can't be grandiloquent,' suddenly exclaimed her ladyship; 'I must speak naturally. Lionel, forgive me. The truth is, Leonora and I want to change houses. We have talked of it for some time, and we think and hope that you, who ought to have some say in the matter, will approve.'

He looked approbation, and anything she chose.

'I am the richer woman of the two,' proceeded Lady Blanche, quickly, 'and King's Beacon takes a great deal of keeping up. I have to help its mistress—she wishes me to say this—as it is. But if she lived at Henham, which yields a much better return for a smaller outlay, all would be easy. You like Henham, Lionel?'

'I do indeed, Lady Blanche.'

'You would approve of the exchange?'

'With all my heart,' emphatically.

'From what I know of you, you would wish to keep up some interests in London, even if you did not care to pursue your present mode of life?'

'I should. Certainly.'

'You and Leonora will talk that over for yourselves. The point now is, that with your consent——'

'Oh, Lady Blanche, my consent!'

'And now, don't you think I should be rather lonely here? Who will take pity on a poor woman all by herself in a huge house? Will three kind little girls——?'

No one ever knew exactly what followed. There was a kind of cry, a shout, or a sob—which was it? Or was it all at once? And they were surging round the speaker, who in vain was struggling for a hearing. And somehow Leonora found herself by Lionel's side, and Poll was in among her sisters; and if Lady Blanche had ever had any doubts as to the absolute and unqualified success of her *coup* they were laid at rest for ever.

'There is only poor Simmins,' said Georgie, subsiding at last. 'Who is to have Simmins?' She appealed generally. 'He is the very rottenest servant that ever was, and knows nothing, and won't do even what he does know——'

'Then he can keep my doves,' cried Leonora, with a happy thought, 'for I know all about them myself, and if I stood over him he might be trusted——'

'Oh, if you stood over him he might,' laughed Georgie.

'There is a cottage that would just do for him,' continued Leonora, with animation. ('Wishy-washy thing' indeed! Lionel knew better.)

'And as The Nook is sold already, there would be no need for any one to go back there,' observed Lady Blanche, addressing herself to Lionel pointedly. He knew what she meant: Bet need never be called upon to face old scenes and associations, and might at once, from that very evening, begin her new life in her new home.

In silence he pressed the kind hand held out to him. It only needed this to complete his own happiness.

There being nothing to wait for, the marriage of Lionel and Leonora took place as speedily as matters could be arranged, amidst the rejoicings of all concerned, and even Lord Umfreville turned up at the wedding.

He did not mind so much his nephew's carrying off the heiress when it proved that King's Beacon, which had been her chief attraction, was to be transferred to Lady Blanche; indeed, it was shrewdly suspected that he began to find her ladyship possessed attractions thenceforth with which he had not hitherto credited her.

He was certainly grateful to her on account of the family honour. Her adoption of his luckless nieces was everything at the moment, and at the close of a prolonged interview with their brother, he was so far won over as to say: 'If it hadn't been for that woman you wouldn't have got out of this scrape as you have done,' which was in its way quite an improvement on the 'remembrances' transmitted through Mr. Stephen Farrell at an earlier date.

As Henham Park was not a part of the Farrell country and had never been supposed to be such except by the denizens of Hay Farm, the bride and bridegroom had no need to fear any awkwardness in that quarter. Lionel, when he did go to Town, chose another route, and for a time studiously avoided all chance of a meeting with any members of the family. Now and then, however, he did run across a Farrell partner in the City, when the two would take off their hats respectfully to each other, feeling it impossible to nod, or to speak.

There was no ill will however between them; and Mrs. Tom, redder and shinier in the nose than ever on such days as she received a surreptitious note from Poll or Georgie, who could never forget her anguish and contrition, 'and the way she took that vile Billy on to her own shoulders,' confided they to each other—Mrs. Tom, we say, always knew what Lionel and Leonora were about, and had a most profound and humble interest in their welfare.

She never went to the White Farm however. And it is quite likely that to this day worthy Mrs. Marjorum still believes in her quondam lodger. There are relics of his dinner party still extant, and no bills ever came to the house after he left.

A quiet year or two was passed, and Worcestershire, or at any rate the neighbourhood of King's Beacon, grew accustomed to Lady

Blanche Massitur's *protégées*, who, as her charges and Lord Umfreville's nieces, were soon established as young ladies of position, while their own charms did the rest. It is satisfactory to be able to state that Bet in time recovered her looks completely, and was generally pronounced the prettiest of the three.

They did not go much into society, and some of the girls who came to see them voted them learned and bookish, which aspersion was an intense delight to Georgie. 'If they only knew!' said she.

The truth was that, inspired by opportunity and Lady Blanche's wish, one and all now busily endeavoured to repair what they termed the rents and tatters of their education. Bet, with something of her old vigour, set to work to read aloud what she could not prevail on her sisters to read to themselves; Poll had an excellent drawing-master, whom she amazed by her proficiency. N.B. King's Beacon was a delightful place to teach at, and there was always luncheon to follow the lesson. All three had a French mistress, whose existence was a dead secret, but there were Continental trips to be provided for, 'And we can't disgrace Lady Blanche,' said Georgie.

'You mean we can't disgrace ourselves,' corrected Bet, and, as it was difficult to say which phrase was the more correct, they fought it out as in the days of *The Nook*. Nothing pleased Georgie more than the revival of old-world wrangles.

The next event in their lives was the death of their uncle, for which they were rather sorry than otherwise, though Bet's reason for being so was not that of her sisters. 'He wasn't much, but we know nothing about Sydney,' said she.

Poll and Georgie were silent, the two knew one thing about Sydney which was still kept inviolate from the third. She had somehow taken it for granted that the person who saw her deserted on the Liverpool landing-stage was a stranger to whom no further interest attached. Her reluctance to revert to the scene made reticence easy on the part of the more enlightened, and they had agreed that since it was probable they might one day have to be acquainted with their cousin, even to have him for a neighbour should he succeed to the title and estates, it would be better to hold their peace, as he was sure to do.

He and Lionel talked once on the subject. 'She knows nothing,' said the latter. 'She has never inquired, and we hope that the whole thing is fading from her memory.'

Sydney Umfreville acquiesced cheerfully. He was a cheerful young man who always looked at things on their bright side. He

was also a hearty, handsome, honest fellow. As he rode off after paying his respects to the ladies at King's Beacon for the first time on succeeding to his inheritance, one and all agreed that the new Lord Umfreville was a vast improvement on the old one.

Apparently this good impression was reciprocated. Soon Lord Umfreville was at King's Beacon morning, noon, and night. He walked, and rode, and dined, and danced with his cousins, and was the most attentive of neighbours to Lady Blanche. Lady Blanche smiled to herself. How delightful that Ughtred was only six miles off.

And at last there came a day when Sydney really had outstayed all limits, and yet would not depart till after he had succeeded in extracting an invitation to return the same evening, when he shot off like an arrow, after a whisper to Bet which Lady Blanche affected not to see.

She was mounting the grand staircase a little later, when she came upon a figure in the windowed recess, which turned at the sound of her step.

It was Bet, with a troubled, wistful face, who wanted to say something.

Lady Blanche, all sympathy and interest, inclined her ear.

'It is Sydney,' said Bet, in a low voice. 'Lady Blanche, has he—been told?'

There was no need to ask what.

'My darling,' said Lady Blanche, softly, 'he does not need to be told. He knows already.'

'Knows already? How? When? How is this possible?'

Then Lady Blanche tells, and a few hours later Lord Umfreville himself tells.

A Lady from the Mountains.

(MRS. GRANT OF LAGGAN.)

IN December, 1880, Robert Louis Stevenson, writing to Mr. Sydney Colvin on the subject of his projected history of the Highlands (unfortunately never to be carried out) observes: 'One pleasant feature is the vast number of delightful writers I shall have to deal with—Burt, Johnson, Boswell, Mrs. Grant of Laggan, Scott.' The modern English reader on reading this passage will probably say: 'Boswell and Johnson I know, and Scott I know, but who is Mrs. Grant of Laggan?' Yet early in this century Mrs. Grant was a popular celebrity in London and Edinburgh society, while her *Letters from the Mountains* was as great a favourite as any of the productions of our modern Kail-yarders. Her vogue, beyond doubt, was genuine, and the enthusiasm she excited spontaneous, for she was the pet of no special literary clique, and the critics were either cold or neglectful. It was the public of the two kingdoms that took her to its heart, wrote to assure her of its admiration, sent her substantial presents, and carried her triumphantly through numerous editions.

Mrs. Grant's works had not sufficient vitality to survive the struggle for permanent fame, and she now only lives in the memory of a few faithful admirers, who find a charm like that which lingers about a sprig of sun-dried heather in her once famous *Letters*. Even had the glamour all faded out of her writings, she deserves to be remembered on account of her championship of her native Highlands and her fellow Highlanders. In the last century Southrons had been taught by such tourists as Burt and Pennant that the Highlands were barren deserts, the men frightful savages, and the women beasts of burden. Of the scenery one writer observed, 'There is not much variety in it, but gloomy spaces, different rocks, and heather high and low. They appear one above another, the whole of a dismal brown, drawing upon a dirty purple, and most of all disagreeable when the heather is in

bloom.' Even Goldsmith declared that in Scottish scenery 'hills and rocks intercept every prospect.' Mrs. Grant, it is true, may be accused of having idealised the Highlands, but then she was a lady who looked upon life through rose-coloured spectacles, and asked little of her surroundings beyond freedom and simplicity.

Judging from the allusions to her in contemporary memoirs, we may gather that Mrs. Grant was even more remarkable as a woman than as a writer, and certainly her early experiences were calculated to produce no common character. In a fragment of autobiography she tells us that she was born in 1755, the only child of Duncan MacVicar, 'a plain, brave, pious soldier,' and of his wife, born a Stewart of Invernahayle. In 1757 Captain MacVicar sailed with his regiment, the 77th Foot, for America, leaving his wife and child in Glasgow. A year later Mrs. MacVicar and her little Anne followed the head of the family, who was then engaged in the Pittsburg expedition. For some time they drifted about, now in Pennsylvania, now in New York, till in 1760 they accompanied the regiment from Albany to Oswego, making the long romantic voyage up the Mohawk River in large boats, sleeping sometimes in the woods, sometimes in the forts which formed a chain of posts in the then trackless wilderness. Anne, now five years old, had received her early lessons from a drunken Scotch sergeant, while the family library consisted of the Bible, some military treatises, and Milton's works, which last the child studied diligently on the return journey a year later.

For three or four years MacVicar was stationed at Albany, where Colonel and Madame Schuyler dispensed hospitality and advice to deserving strangers, protected the new settlers, tried to alleviate the hardships of British troops, and acted as the guardian angels of the poor Indians of the district. Madame Schuyler took a great fancy to the little Anne, who astonished her at their first interview by making a long and apposite quotation from *Paradise Lost*. From this valuable friend the child received all her early culture; from her, too, she learnt to admire the savage virtues of the Mohawks, and to appreciate the charms of the simple life. Half a century later Mrs. Grant told Madame Schuyler's story in her *Memoirs of an American Lady*.

When the war was over, Captain MacVicar had intended to settle in America on allotments granted by the British Government, but his health giving way he decided to return to his native land, leaving his affairs in the charge of a friend. His property, which was intended as a comfortable provision for his

family, was swallowed up during the American Rebellion; or rather it was taken possession of by persons who, when peace was restored, had nine points of the law in their favour. Anne MacVicar, at fourteen, was regarded as something of a curiosity at Glasgow, where the family settled for the next three or four years. She lacked all the accomplishments possessed by other young ladies of her age, but her new acquaintances found her unusually familiar with books and with Nature. In spite of her unlikeness to other girls, she made at this time two or three ardent friendships, which in each case were only broken by death.

In 1773 Captain MacVicar was offered the post of barrack-master at Fort Augustus, and though the Fort was at that time, before the making of the Caledonian Canal, in a most isolated position, he could not resist the temptation of again entering on military service. Anne, then just entering her eighteenth year, by no means disliked the idea of a sequestered life, though it was not without a pang that she parted from her friends, and renounced the opportunities of social intercourse that might be enjoyed at Glasgow. The *Letters from the Mountains* begin abruptly with an account of the leisurely journey to Fort Augustus, *viâ* Loch Lomond, Inverary, Oban, and Fort William. At this time Anne seems to have been a little inclined to pose as a *femme incomprise*, and there is a touch of youthful pedantry in her frequent allusions to the *Odyssey* which she carried with her in the chaise, and in her complaint: 'I can always get people to laugh with me, but the difficult thing is to get one "soft, modest, melancholy female fair" that will be grave with me, and enter into my serious and solemn reflections.' Again, in her long rides over the solitary moors she is supported by a benevolent project for the reformation of certain female friends, or such of them as, to use her own words, 'say or do no great harm, but who bewilder their brains and waste their time among endless mazes of ribbon and laces, and tattle and tales. I am convinced one solitary pilgrimage over the brown desert might wean them from this trifling, and teach them to think, and "on reason build resolve," which might be found a column of true dignity, even in woman.'

The first note of admiration for Highland character is struck in a letter from Oban, in which the writer declares that the Highlanders resemble the French in being 'poor with a better grace than other people. If they want certain luxuries or conveniences, they do not look embarrassed, and make you feel

ashamed by paltry apologies, which you don't know how to answer; they rather dismiss any sentiment of that kind by a playful raillery for which they have a talent.' At Kilmore, where a long stay was made, Anne was taken to hear a sermon four miles away, 'setting out on horseback in a shower of snow, which people here mind no more than hair powder. . . . When I began to look about me (at church) the dresses and countenances of the people presented a new matter of speculation. This is certainly a fine country to grow old in; I could not spare a look for the young people, so much was I absorbed in contemplating their grandmothers. They preserve the form of dress worn some hundred years ago. Stately, erect, and self-satisfied, without a trace of the languor or coldness of age, they march up the area with gaudy-coloured plaids fastened about their breast with a silver brooch like the full moon in shape.'

Miss MacVicar accounts for the cheerful expression of these ancient dames by the fact that 'they serve for song-books and circulating libraries, so faithfully do they preserve and accurately detail the tales of old and the songs of the bards. All this makes them the delight of the very young in the happy period of wonder and simplicity, and finding themselves so prevents their being peevish or querulous.' After being asked by the beadle whether she had any Gaelic, because if not the sermon would be in English, Anne describes how she and the genteel part of the congregation were ushered into a kind of public-house, where all met to converse and take refreshment while their horses were preparing. 'People not singularly pious,' she observes, 'cross ferries and ride great distances in bad weather—not solely, I fear, to hear the glad tidings in church, but to meet friends in this good-humoured, kindly way, who can tell them all about their eighteenth cousins in India or America.'

Fort William, where another stay was made, found no favour in the young traveller's critical eyes. She describes it as a seaport without animation and a village without simplicity, as having plains without verdure, hills without woods, mountains without majesty, and a sky without a sun. Even the river, she declares, looks gloomy and stupid, and Ben Nevis is a great clumsy mountain. At this time Anne is full of the tragedy of Glencoe, which had been enacted but thirty years before, and narrates the now well-known story in picturesque and impassioned style, all her sympathies being with the ill-fated Highlanders. It was a long and fatiguing journey on horseback across the brown moors to Fort Augustus.

The letters give a vivid description of Glenmore and its fast-following lakes, linked by filial streams which, as the writer says, 'invite art to the aid of Nature in forming a canal that should divide Scotland; but that will be the business of a wiser and richer century.' The Caledonian Canal was begun thirty years later, in 1805, but was not finished till 1847.

At Fort Augustus the small society was almost exclusively military. 'Nobody will care for me here,' writes Anne, luxuriating after youthful fashion in the prospect of undeserved loneliness and neglect, 'because no one will understand me. I am too rustic, too simple at least, for people of the world, with whom manner is everything; and though myself uneducated, I painfully feel that I have too much refinement, too much delicacy, for uninformed people, with whom I have no point of union but simplicity.' Quite an ordeal was the first visit to the captain's wife and the governor's daughter, though Anne explains that 'I put on my lilac, as you may well believe, but neither that nor my new bonnet inspired me with confidence.' The girl found her chief resource during the next three or four years in her books, her correspondence, and her long rambles over the moor. She discusses her reading at great length, and with a good deal of acumen describes her jaunts to Inverness and Perth, and gives lively sketches of the life and society of the Fort. 'Believe that our antiquated beaux and rusticated belles,' she writes in 1777, 'do everything in the country that yours do in the town, only with more languor and ill-humour. When they walk, it is on the hard gravel road to get an appetite; when they read, 'tis some periodical matter, to doze away time till the card-party begins. . . . We have besides the old immovable set, an officer of invalids, his wife and daughter from Edinburgh, who are ever pining for want of company they could ill afford to keep, and public places which it would ruin them to frequent. They strive to exalt our idea of their former consequence by regretting that there are no noblemen's seats at a visiting distance, and that tumblers and rope-dancers never come this way.'

In May, 1779, Anne MacVicar was married to a member of the numerous Grant clan, who had formerly been chaplain to the garrison, but who now ministered to the spiritual needs of the parish of Laggan, a little village on the spurs of the Grampians between Kingussie and Loch Laggan. Even in these days Laggan lies outside the beaten track of tourists, since the railroad has not yet invaded those mountain fastnesses, and a hundred and twenty

years ago it must have been completely in the desert. Writing to an intimate friend a couple of months after her marriage, Mrs. Grant explains that she and the man for whom she has made the 'greatest of all sacrifices' have, after a few weeks' wanderings, taken up their abode at the pastor's cottage, which was literally pastoral. 'Here,' she says, 'we have since continued, not enjoying the ideal felicity of romances, but that rational and obtainable degree of happiness which is derived from a sincere mutual esteem, health, tranquillity, and a grateful consciousness of being placed in a situation equally remote from the cares of poverty and the snares of wealth. You know of old my notions of matrimony, and how meanly I thought of the usual degree of happiness enjoyed by those who enter into willing subjection. This has proved an advantage to me, as I had no sanguine expectations to be disappointed, and find more of the attention and complacency of a lover in the husband than I ever expected.'

The life of a remote Highland village was far more to Mrs. Grant's taste than that of a town or garrison. In the three volumes of *Letters from the Mountains* there is not a single word of complaint of the loneliness, the inconveniences, or the hardships of such a residence. She nearly always writes of Laggan in sunshine, with the flowers blooming, and the stream singing over the stones. She loved the people, and quickly won their hearts by adopting their customs, learning their language, and as far as was possible living their own life. She soon became an adept at farming, which in the Highlands was left chiefly to the women of the family, and she took an evident pride and pleasure in her multifarious duties. Writing after some years of married life to a friend of whom she had lost sight for a time, she reviews her situation with enviable complacency. Having described her comfortable cottage, fruitful garden and honeysuckle-covered porch, she explains that 'we hold a farm (from the Duke of Gordon) at very easy rent, which supports a dozen of milch cows and a couple of hundred sheep, with a range of summer pasture on the mountains for our young stock. . . . I am very fond of the lower class of the people; they have sentiment, serious habits, and a kind of natural courtesy; in short, they are not *mob*. . . . There is a plentiful lack of wealth and an abundant scarcity of knowledge; but our common people have not often low, sordid notions, cant phraseology, nor the callous hardness that marks that class of mind in whatever situation.'

The sight of Highland women working like beasts of burden

in the fields filled the breasts of English tourists with indignation, but Mrs. Grant regards the matter from a very different point of view. 'Though the men are now civilised to what they were,' she writes, 'yet the custom of leaving the weight of all cares on the more helpless sex still continues, and has produced this one good effect, that they are from this habit less helpless and dependent. The men think they preserve dignity by this mode of management; the women find a degree of power and consequence that they would not exchange for inglorious ease.' The minister's wife took her full share of the pastoral work. She describes a typical summer day, beginning at four in the morning, when the shepherds and herdsmen arrived from the mountain meadows for supplies of all kinds, which they received at her hands. 'Then I have Car's breakfast to get, Janet's hank to reel, Kate's lesson to hear, her sampler to rectify, and all must be over by eleven; while his reverence, calm and regardless of all this bustle, wonders what detains me, urging me out to walk, while the soaring larks and smiling meadows second the invitation. . . . Now, I will not plague you with a detail of the whole. Yet spare your pity; for this day is succeeded by an evening so sweetly serene, our walk by the river is so calmly pleasing, our lounge by the burn-side so indolently easy, our conversation in the long-wished-for hour of leisure so interesting, and then our children—say you wish me more leisure, but do not pity me.'

This picture is idyllic enough, though the modern reader is inclined to ask why 'his reverence' should not have lent a helping hand with the affairs of the farm instead of wondering what all the bustle was about. But life was not all work at Laggan, though it seems extraordinary that the mistress of the house should have found time for anything except her domestic duties, which included the bearing and rearing of no less than twelve children. There were visits to the numerous Grant relations and an occasional journey to Fort George, where Captain MacVicar had now settled, as well as much social intercourse with the retired officers and other small gentry in the neighbourhood of Laggan, whither, in spite of its distance and obscurity, Mrs. Grant declared that her sworn enemy the *ton* pursued, overtook, and surrounded her. But that she was no misanthrope is proved by the fact that she was always ready to enter into and enjoy the rustic gaieties of the people. In one letter there is a long account of the wedding feast of two trusty retainers, Thomas and Anne, at which above a hundred persons assisted; the music and dancing, as she assures a correspondent,

being superior to anything that a mere Southron could imagine. Mr. Grant took it into his head to be very wise and serious, and reproved the host for killing so many sheep and collecting so many persons, but his wife observes that she 'thought it hard to grudge this one day of glorious felicity to those who, though doomed to struggle through a life of hardship and penury, have all the love of society, the taste for conviviality, and even the sentiment that animates social intercourse and constitutes the enviable part of enjoyment in higher circles.' Every one was quiet, orderly, and happy in the extreme; the scene, according to the Lady of Laggan, being one that could only take place in those favoured regions, for 'here only you may condescend without degradation, since here only is the bond between the superior and inferior classes a kindly one.'

In the course of the Letters we make acquaintance with several of the Laggan celebrities, the most remarkable being a venerable Sybil, who knits garters, sings her native airs, and bids fair to rival Old Parr. 'In her,' says Mrs. Grant, 'I have the pleasure of an old woman's conversation without the plague of gossiping, for if she has any scandal King William is the subject of it. She is full of anecdote, but scorns to talk of anything that happened within the last thirty years. Madame de Maintenon is the heroine of her imagination; she talks of her as if she were still living, and constantly quotes the ivory wheel with which she spun Lewis into subjection, to our girls, for she considers spinning one of the cardinal virtues.' Then there was a delightful dairymaid who came to her mistress with a wonderful story of a cow belonging to a neighbouring minister which had refused to get up and leave the byre until she had sent for her master, and informed him that he was to expect 'a summer of famine, a harvest of blood, and a winter of tears.' Having delivered this lugubrious prophecy, the animal rose and went about her business. Mrs. Grant, it is evident, lent a kindly ear to these stories, for she regarded the darkest superstition as infinitely preferable to the cynicism and scepticism that had been imported from France.

The numerous Grant children seem to have been brought up in Spartan fashion, being sent up to the mountain meadows with the cows in summer to harden them, a treatment which in their case did not prove very efficacious, four of them dying in infancy. They were all taught to lisp Gaelic from their babyhood, their mother taking great delight in that original and emphatic language. 'I am determined,' she writes, 'that my children shall drink from the pure wells of Gaelic undefiled.'

They shall taste the animated and energetic conversation of the natives, and an early acquaintance with the poetry of Nature shall guard them against false taste or affectation. I never desire to hear an English word out of their mouths till they are four or five years old.' Writing in her old age, when life at Laggan had become no more than a golden memory, Mrs. Grant describes how 'during long days I knit my stocking, or carried my infant from sheaf to sheaf, sitting and walking in the harvest-field, attentively observing conversation which I was not supposed to understand. Seldom a day passed that I had not two or three petitioners in the kitchen, entreating for advice, medicine, or some other petty favour. Often I sat down with them and led them to converse, captivated with the strength and beauty of the expressions in their native tongue.'

Books and news travelled slowly into those remote regions, but both were eagerly appreciated when at last they arrived. In the autumn of 1788 the bard of bards, 'Ossian Macpherson,' who had reached the mouldy harp of Ossian from the withered oak of Selma, was moving like a meteor over his native hills. This bard, says Mrs. Grant, 'is as great a favourite of fortune as of fame, and has got more by the old harp of Ossian than most of his predecessors could draw out of the silver strings of Apollos.' To the last she was a firm believer in the genuineness of Macpherson's finds, and not all the scepticism of all the Edinburgh Reviewers could shake her faith. The *Sorrows of Werter*, read in 1789, greatly excited the dwellers in the quiet parsonage. They execrated the plan, detested the example, reprobated the reasoning, shuddered at the catastrophe, but were 'perniciously' charmed with the vivid colouring, the glow of sentiment, the energy of thought, and the simple unadorned pathos which, without a pomp of sounds, penetrates and melts the very soul. Even more shocking to the Lagganites, and without the same redeeming charm, was Mary Wollstonecroft's *Rights of Women*. Mrs. Grant expresses her disbelief in the desirability of creating hot-beds for feminine genius, and candidly admits that 'innovation disconcerts us; new light blinds us; we detest the Rights of Man and abominate those of Woman.'

A visit to Glasgow in 1797, the first probably since she left it in 1773, astonished the Lady of Laggan, who writes with doubtful approval of the luxuries of the intellect—circulating libraries, lectures, and the like—which had been instituted quite of late years. Of the lectures she observes: 'They might be a very harmless

lounge for the female auditory, if the idea of being greatly the wiser for hearing a man talk an hour about carbon and chemistry would not tend towards conceit and affectation. I always thought a moderate knowledge of geography and history a very desirable acquisition for a woman, because it qualifies her for mingling in solid and rational conversation. . . . What business women have with any science but that which serves to improve and adorn conversation I cannot comprehend. That knowledge which neither improves the heart nor meliorates the temper, which makes us neither more useful nor more pleasing, I cannot consider as a desirable acquisition.'

For a lady who had read Homer openly in her youth and scribbled a good deal in middle age, she was perhaps rather hard upon such of her sisters as indulged their tastes in other intellectual exercises. But Mrs. Grant prided herself upon the fact that she had never published a line, but had lost, destroyed, or given away her poems. However, the time was near at hand when her talents had to be turned to account, and her horror of publicity surmounted. In 1801 Mr. Grant died, after only a few days' illness, leaving his widow with eight children and very scanty means. It was then suggested by her friends that she should publish a selection of her verses by subscription. The Duchess of Gordon interested herself in the matter, and eventually no less than three thousand subscribers were obtained. The chief piece in the volume was a poem in the conventional rhymed couplets called 'The Highlanders,' while the remainder consisted of songs and translations from the Gaelic. For Southrons the subject had the merit of freshness and novelty, while the prosaic trot of the verse would be quite to the taste of the period. For modern readers, however, the charm of the poems has irrevocably fled. The opening lines will give a sufficient idea of 'The Highlanders' and its remarkable lack of inspiration :—

Come, then, explore with me each widening glen,
Far from the noisy haunts of busy men ;
Let us with steadfast eye attentive trace
The local habits of the Celtic race.

In 1803 the farm was given up. Mrs. Grant bade a long farewell to her beloved Laggan, and the whole family removed to a house at Stirling. Although helping hands had been held out to the widow in her hour of need, trouble was seldom far from her door, and soon the clouds began to gather again upon the horizon

of the little household. The elder son, Duncan, was then at Marlow, preparing for the Army. A disturbance among the students in which he was implicated involved his mother in much anxiety and expense. The matter was hushed up, Duncan received a commission in the service of the East India Company, and, in order to provide the necessary equipment, Mrs. Grant was persuaded to publish a selection of her letters—a proceeding to which at first she was most averse. She considered it indelicate to publish letters in the lifetime of the writer, and she saw that it would be necessary to exclude many of the most amusing and interesting passages. However, there seemed to be no alternative, and in January 1805 she went to London by sea to arrange her son's affairs and to interview the publishers. Armed with an introduction, she went to Messrs. Longman and Rees, feeling as much ashamed of her defective and ill-arranged manuscript as Falstaff was of his ragged recruits. More fortunate, however, than most aspiring authors, she heard in a few days that the manuscript would do very well for publication, that it would be ready in three or four months, and that she would receive one half of the proceeds. During a stay of six weeks in town, Mrs. Grant was introduced to a little literary society, dined with Mrs. Carter, and made the acquaintance of Joanna Baillie. She was also taken to the Opera—where she fell asleep in the middle of the performance—and to see the infant Roscius, who was then delighting the town.

Nothing more was heard of the *Letters from the Mountains* during the remainder of the year, which passed quietly at Stirling. In the summer of 1806 Mrs. Grant was astonished to hear a friend casually remark that a book of that name (it was published anonymously) divided with one or two other new works the attention of readers in town. In October of the same year she mentions the warm interest that the book has excited, even in strangers, and the considerable pecuniary benefit that she has already reaped. The publishers allowed her a handsome sum in addition to her half-profits, three merchants of London sent her a bill for three hundred pounds as a tribute of their admiration, and Dr. Porteous, Bishop of London, offered to edit the second edition of the work. Mrs. Grant was now a popular celebrity, though the reviewers paid scant attention to her book. But her head was not turned by this unexpected success, which she attributed to the novelty of the subject and the reviving taste for Nature and simplicity. Indeed, the fortunate author had enough

to keep her sober, for her daughter Charlotte died in April 1807, and her daughter Catherine only four months later, so that the year of literary triumph was in reality a year of domestic woe.

In 1807 Mrs. Grant began her *Memoirs of an American Lady*, which, as has been said, was a sketch of her early friend, Madame Schuyler, and of life in Albany before the Revolution. About the same time Lady Glasgow and one or two other ladies, having asked Mrs. Grant to take charge of their daughters, she thought of removing to London, and there setting up a small and select establishment for young ladies. But her girls were so averse to leaving their native land that it was decided the move should be no further than to Edinburgh. Here a house was taken in Heriot Row, and the Grants found themselves eagerly welcomed into the best literary society of the capital. Scott, Jeffrey, Henry Mackenzie, and, later, Professor Wilson were among their intimates, while they received most of the celebrities who visited Edinburgh—Southey, Joanna Baillie, and Mrs. Hemans. Americans, too, thought no visit to Scotland complete without a pilgrimage to the shrine of Madame Schuyler's biographer, the *Memoirs of an American Lady* having obtained almost as great a success as the *Letters from the Mountains*. Consequently, Mrs. Grant's correspondence, which was published after her death, formed a record of the literary life and society of Edinburgh between 1810 and 1838.

Mrs. Grant made her first acquaintance with Scott at the Duchess of Gordon's in 1809, and thought his appearance very unpromising and commonplace; 'yet, though no gleam of genius animates his countenance, much of it appears in his conversation, which is rich, varied, easy and animated, without the least of the petulance with which the "faculty" are not unjustly reproached.' Soon after, Scott and Jeffrey called on Mrs. Grant together, and she remarks that 'you would think from their appearance that the body of each was formed to lodge the soul of the other. Jeffrey looks the poet all over; the ardent eye, the nervous agitation, the visibly quick perceptions, keep one's attention awake in expectation of flashes of genius; nor is that expectation disappointed. Walter Scott has not a gleam of poetic fire in his countenance, which merely suggests the idea of plain good sense, but there is much amusement in his good-humoured unaffected conversation.' Mrs. Grant was persuaded from the first of the identity of the author of *Waverley*. 'I am satisfied,' she writes,

‘that Walter Scott and no other is the author of that true and chaste delineation of Scottish manners. He is not, however, just to the Highlanders, and the specimens of Highland manners, that he gives are not fair ones.’

In 1814 death was again busy in Mrs. Grant’s family. Her daughter Anne died in August, and in the same month (though of course the news did not reach Edinburgh till much later) her son Duncan died at Surat. In 1815 the now diminished family moved to a house in Princes Street. About this time they made the acquaintance of Professor Wilson (Christopher North), then known as the author of the *Isle of Palms*. Of his eccentricity we hear a good deal; and one of the most striking proofs of this, in Mrs. Grant’s eyes, was his setting out on a walking tour with his wife through the remoter Highlands. ‘I shall be charmed to see them come back alive,’ says the good lady; ‘meantime it has cost me not a little pain to explain to my less romantic friends in their track that they are genuine gentlefolks in masquerade.’ Happily, the adventurous poet and his mate returned in the highest health and spirits, ‘having walked several hundred miles in the Highlands, seen much beauty, felt much courtesy, and slept in the humblest cottages, always getting clean beds; in short, never did anything turn out so well that was looked upon as so ridiculous at the outset.’

Although Mrs. Grant wrote but little in her later years, except an *Essay on the Present State of the Highlands* and a few poems, she kept up with the literature of her day. Scott was to the last her favourite author, but she was also among the first to appreciate the poetry of Wordsworth. ‘I can scarcely believe,’ she writes to a friend, ‘that anyone has more vivid enjoyment of Scott’s novels and Wordsworth’s *Excursion* than myself, for I am convinced that there does not exist a person in decent station, in any degree cultivated or refined, who has had more intercourse with the lower classes. . . . People laugh at the Pedlar (in the *Excursion*), I do not: all the realities of life are so familiar to me, and the peculiarities of the Scottish manners of fifty years ago have left so vivid an impression on my mind that I can easily conceive a pedlar reading Milton. The peasant or mechanic who half spells a chapter of the Bible on a rainy Sunday, no more resembles him who, bred up in the land of song and story, reads the Scriptures from infancy with an enlightened mind;—such a one is no more to be compared to the dull unfeeling clown than the crater of Etna to a bottle manufactory.’

Southey and Mrs. Hemans were among Mrs. Grant's visitors in her later years, and were the only two poets with whom personal acquaintance brought no disappointment. 'The Laureate,' she writes, 'has the finest poetical countenance, features unusually high and somewhat strong though regular, and a quantity of bushy black hair. I have heard Southey called silent and constrained, but I did not find him so. He talked easily and much, without seeming in the least consequential, nor saying a word for effect.' Of Mrs. Hemans, for whom her hostess had a genuine affection, we read: 'She is entirely feminine, and her language has a charm like that of her verse—the same ease and peculiar grace, with more vivacity. She has not the slightest tinge of affectation, and is so refined, so gentle, that you must both love and respect her.' Among the newer literary lights of these years were De Quincey and Miss Ferrier. The former, Mrs. Grant had met in London fourteen years before his *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* appeared (1823), and she recognised him directly through the thin disguise of his book. On the subject of Miss Ferrier she is rather less enthusiastic than the rest of her countrywomen, though she allows her a clever, caustic mind, and joins the general voice in praising *The Inheritance* in spite of its over-strong vein of caricature. 'There are some here,' she adds, 'who laud this book beyond measure, and even hold it up as excelling the invisible Charmer.'

Although Mrs. Grant was crippled in 1820 by a severe fall, she retained her wonderful vitality of mind and body. In that year she paid a visit to Dumfries, where she had the satisfaction of seeing Burns's Jean, 'a very comely woman, with plain, sound sense, and very good manners. She is much esteemed and respected in this place, and lives in the same house that her husband inhabited. The street is now called Burns Street. Her house is a model of neatness and good taste; the simple elegance with which everything is disposed is so consistent, and the room in which the hapless bard used to write is still in its former state, as if it were a crime to alter its simple furniture.' Another interesting visit was to Abbotsford, which Mrs. Grant declared she should have guessed to belong to the 'gifted baronet' even though she had been in ignorance of its owner. In the summer of 1825 a tour was undertaken to the Highlands, then an arduous enterprise for a lady of over seventy who could only move about on crutches. A visit to her beloved Laggan, the first after nearly thirty years' absence, must have revived many poignant memories in the mind

of the woman whose name was now inseparably connected with that of the Highland village.

In 1827 Mary, Mrs. Grant's last remaining daughter, died after a long illness, Isabella having died in 1823, and Moore in 1821. These many and terrible domestic sorrows aroused unusual interest and sympathy for the bereaved mother among her friends in Edinburgh, and also among visitors to the town, who were further attracted by her undoubted talents and social charm. A Cornish gentleman, Mr. John Carne, author of *Letters from the East*, has left a curious little vignette of our heroine in his privately printed correspondence. Writing from Edinburgh in September, 1823, he says: 'Among the literary ladies of my acquaintance here is Mrs. Grant, whose *Letters from the Mountains* you have probably read. An extraordinary woman, now past sixty years of age, she has lost one after another, within a few years, three lovely and accomplished daughters and a son—one of the former in a very melancholy way; to use Beattie's affecting expression of his son, her elegant mind became mingled with madness. But the vigour of her mind supports Mrs. Grant through all. She had reared them in the retirement of Laggan with such exquisite pains and attention, and they were so very handsome and elegant, that their friends seem to say they have left no equals behind them. The powers of conversation possessed by Mrs. Grant are considerable, as well as her acquaintance with the manners of her country, and most of its characters. And what person would you give to the mother of such loveliness, the romantic writer whose sensibility of style made you love the very wilds of America? Did you ever wish to see the Meg Merrilies of Scott? You should see Mrs. Grant, then, enter a room, with her very tall, large figure, Highland plaid thrown over her shoulders, masculine features and harsh voice, with a cast in one eye, and you have the stern and dark Queen of the Blue-stockings in Edinburgh.'

Mrs. Grant ended her days under the roof of her younger son, the only survivor of her twelve children. She died of influenza in November, 1838, being then in her eighty-fourth year. For the last twelve years of her life she had been in receipt of a pension of a hundred a year, granted by George the Fourth, on the representation of Scott, Jeffrey, Mackenzie, and other friends.

GEORGE PASTON.

My Friend Donald.

HE was my first friend in Scotland. I came downstairs from the sound nap that refreshed me after the night of travelling to give orders about my bicycle, which I had left in the hotel corridor, in its wrappings, and there I found all had been anticipated. My beloved companion was standing ready equipped for the road, pedalled, saddled and belled, and as bright from rubbing as I felt after my bath and sleep.

'Who did this?' I asked astonished, and a small boy at my side replied, 'I did.'

Of course I jumped. 'Boy' and 'bicycle' are an alliterative but not a pleasing conjunction of terms; like 'miching mallecho,' they generally mean mischief. This boy's tone, however, in the new accent that was already so attractive, inspired an instinctive and curious confidence, so I turned and looked at him. He was very small, apparently not more than ten years old, but his face was of any age, when you worked through the freckles and got at the features. He had red hair—which I protest is beautiful—and a nose of character. But it was the overpowering seriousness of his expression that impressed me as he stood there, hands in pockets, surveying his handiwork and me.

'You did it?' I asked much more respectfully. 'How old are you?'

'Fourteen,' replied the youth, with an air of concession; and he added, 'I'm a cyclist mysel', an' I ken hoo it's dune.'

'But why did you do it?' I persisted. This was a type of boy hitherto undiscovered, and it seemed worth while to get at his motives.

'Oh, because you're a woman body, an' here you're lane,' was the unexpected reply. And then I had my first experience of a Scottish compliment, for the charm of this speech was hardly in the air when he added, 'And fine I ken ye have no sae great experience.'

This from fourteen to——. No, I won't finish that sentence. I gasped humbly:

'What makes you think that?'

'Because,' said the boy, 'ye havena a tool-bag.' This was too true, and had often and often been laid to my charge by practical friends at home. 'An' I'm maist certain,' went on the relentless youth, 'that if ye had the tools ye wouldna ken hoo to use them.'

Alas, he had taken my measure correctly! It was a moment of deep humiliation. But, after all, Donald's was not the scorn of scorn; he had the pity that goes with a strong nature, the tolerance which the superior may extend to the manifestly inferior creature. He looked at me with a relenting glance.

'Fine I wondered,' he said, 'that English fowks wad let a woman body gae sae far when she's no fit to take care o' hersel'. I saw ye at breakfast, an' ye didna eat your meat.'

It was the moment to throw myself on his confidence, and I embraced it.

'It isn't the fault of the English folks,' I said; 'I'm an American—what's your name?—oh, Donald—and I and my bicycle go just where we like, Donald. I've been all over England—though you don't believe I'm a cyclist.'

'Withoot a tool-bag?' severely. 'An' what dae ye dae if ye puncture or get a screw loose?'

'Oh! Donald' (must I confide *all* my lamentable weakness to this judicial breast?), 'I *never* get into trouble on a bicycle tour. There's always a man about'—this in a conciliatory and inclusive way, not lost on fourteen. 'Why, see how nice you've been, directly I arrive, to put my bike in order for me, and without my asking.'

He shook his head, which looked concentrated wisdom.

'It's no weel tae pit your trust in strangers,' he said. 'Syne I'm here on a visit tae my aunt, an' ye'll hae nae need tae luik aboot for a mon—I'll tak' care o' ye.'

And he did. During my stay he constituted himself my protector and guardian, always made a complete survey of my bicycle before I started on a tour and when I returned, kept me posted about the time for lighting up (Donald was desperately afraid of my falling into the clutches of a 'bobby,' and refused to accept the amiable character a long experience as lady cyclist had enabled me to give of the guardians of the peace), and kept my pneumatic tires pumped to the point of bursting. But it must not be supposed that he ever relaxed from his attitude of benevo-

lent but grave superiority. We were friends, but I knew my place as a mere woman body, ignorant of the use of tools. Once, when I suggested that I was not yet too old to take up that neglected branch of education, he settled my ambitions for ever. 'I'll no say ye canna sing' (he sometimes crept upstairs in the gloaming and listened to Scottish songs from the doorway, correcting my pronunciation later) 'an' dae the likes o' thae things, an' no sae bad; but I'd no trust ye wi' a wrench, nor yet tae mend a puncture,' was his unflattering decision.

Donald did not possess a bike yet, and my 'tips' went into a perlypig in which he was saving up to buy one. But once we had a ride together, for his mother and sisters took him to Aberdour for the holidays; and when by special invitation I cycled over to see them, Donald confided to me that he could get the hire of a bicycle very cheaply next morning—in fact for 'saxpence,' were that useful coin to be got at. The perlypig was in Edinburgh, and, besides, I doubt whether on any account would Donald have broken into his bank. 'But I could tak' ye tae Dunfermline,' he said suggestively, 'only I must engage it the nicht, for three mair laddies are wantin' tae hire it, an' I got first chance'—dependent, I guessed, on my arrival, and I sent him off to secure the prize.

Next morning there seemed so long a delay that one of his sisters and I went to see what detained my escort. We found him in a backyard with two other laddies, and two bicycles, their possessions, from which the canny youths intended to 'realise' during the holidays. Donald was debating the rival merits of these with a judicial air. It was a difficult choice, since the one had a limp saddle, and the tire of the other's front wheel hung casually thereon by a piece of string. Finally he decided to trust to the bad saddle.

'If it comes aff, I'll ride on the springs,' he said heroically—and as it did come off, of course, I had an opportunity of admiring his courage, for he never murmured. To a weak suggestion on my part that he should turn back he replied, when he once made up his mind he went through it, and I thought of the 'Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled,' and urged no more. He took command of me, of course, from the start.

'What dae ye dae when ye dinna ken the road?' he asked, when we were fairly off.

'Do? Why, I inquire the way, Donald, from the first man I meet. And only to the next turn, for unless I take that precaution in Scotland, I'm directed all the way to John o' Groat's.'

'Weel, ye'll no have occasion tae ask the day,' he replied over his shoulder, 'for I'm alang wi' ye an' I'll dae a' that's necessary.'

So he rode ahead, and did all that was necessary. The more heroic it was that his mother had made him slip into his best jacket at the last moment, and this being shorter than his old one divulged a melancholy secret in connection with his trousers, of which poor Donald was painfully aware. So between his efforts to hold his jacket well over the patch, to manage that the saddle did not slip away from under him, and to keep his eye resolutely upon me, lest I should go the wrong side of the road or commit other breaches of cycling etiquette—he had no faith in me first to last on the road—his ride to Dunfermline must have been a fearful joy and dear at sixpence. And to crown all, I discovered by his sigh of relief at the cycle-repairer's, when the saddle was secured for the home journey for sixpence, that the dread of my being let in for some frightful expense had been weighing on his mind, and had probably occasioned his refusal of a second pork-pie at our luncheon. A long and intimate acquaintance with the affinity between boys and pork-pies had made me doubt the sincerity of his refusal. Poor Donald! We couldn't climb back. We had seen the Abbey, where he came with a shocked face to tell me he had discovered some 'idols,' but was relieved to hear they were only effigies of Scots worthies, and St. Margaret's Well, which to his disgust proved to be but a 'bit hole,' and we had to return to dinner.

Donald's care was the last remembrance of the hotel. I had lost the key of my largest trunk, and sent the boots to fetch an ironmonger. Coming in presently, I found John had not gone—Master Donald, he said, had told him he wasn't to go.

'Oh, but this is too much!' I exclaimed indignantly, and marched up to my bedroom irate.

Donald was kneeling before my trunk and looked up with his serious face full of rebuke.

'Why didna ye send for me and no for the ironmonger? A new key—that's saxpence—and the mon's time, anither, or mair. An' I just luiked amang my mither's keys, an' here's the very ane to fit it. An' what's mair, I'll no believe your ain key is lost, an' I'm gaen tae find it. Ye'll no spend your money sae foolish-like.'

And sure enough he did find the key, and sent it after me, with a request for the postage thereof. Donald was always business-like in trifles.

MARGARETTA BYRDE.

Indian Famines.

OUR attention has lately been concentrated so much on South Africa that the misfortunes which are befalling India are apt to be rather overlooked. And yet we have just been told by the Viceroy that during the last three years the plague has slain hundreds of thousands of our fellow-subjects there, and that the famine now existing is the worst of the twenty-seven which have visited the country during the past century. Over six millions of people were in receipt of relief when the last figures were published, and the worst has probably barely been reached.

It is rather curious to find how little comprehension there still is in England of the causes of these visitations, and of the manner in which they are dealt with by Government. It often seems to be assumed, even by some of our legislators, that it must be owing to some fault in our method of governing that famines occur, that we could prevent them if we chose to do so; or at a juncture like the present, when famine is an actual fact, that we might entirely prevent any loss of life. These ideas arise chiefly from ignorance of the conditions found in India, although it might have been imagined that Rudyard Kipling and the other writers who have lately brought that country so largely into the field of fiction, would have given us a sufficiently vivid idea of it to prevent some of these misapprehensions. Whether the picture Mr. Kipling gives of Anglo-Indian society is an altogether true one may be open to doubt, but his descriptions of Indian scenery truly show the hand of a master—the small touches which give the very atmosphere of the East, which make you almost smell the dust, hear the creak of the water-wheel and the shrill whistle of the kite, and feel the blinding, scorching glare of the pitiless sun—all are sketched from the life. To the diligent reader of Kipling, the scenery, therefore, should he visit India, comes as no surprise, for he has long ceased to

think of it as only a land of palms and rice-fields, of rolling rivers and tropical vegetation ; he is prepared for the arid plains and waterless deserts, the interminable miles of country covered only with dusty shrubs and scanty pasture. He first sees it probably in the winter season, when all is brown and parched, the rivers are shrunk and the canals are low, and he wonders whence the nourishment can come to feed the hundreds of millions he knows are living there. Perhaps then he realises for the first time the enormous importance of the regular coming of the rains, that it is they and they alone, that can turn the scorched, dusty plains into smiling fields, and make all the difference between starvation and prosperity to those millions.

To us at home, weather is a secondary matter. A wet day may be an inconvenience, or prolonged heat and drought mean temporary discomfort. To the farmer a dry spring or untimely rain during harvest may mean a short hay-crop or mildewed corn, and to him such misfortunes may bring individual loss or even ruin ; but the community as a whole, and the town-dweller in particular, is quite indifferent. Bread rarely goes up in price, and then never to an extent to cause serious suffering, thanks to the ceaseless and, so to speak, automatic supplies of hay and corn which pour into the country from every part of the globe, and are easily and quickly distributed. And so it is over most of Europe. It is only when we reach Russia, which in some of its conditions bears a strong resemblance to India, that famines become well-known and much-dreaded phenomena.

Look first of all at the climatic conditions of India. Over most of the country practically no rain falls except at two seasons of the year. From June to August inclusive there should be steady and almost constant rain, and about the New Year a slight amount. On the summer rains depends the success of the main harvest, the autumn one ; and on the winter rains, that of the smaller spring harvest. Obviously without water, cultivation must be impossible, and it is difficult to see how the most determined critic of Government can hold it responsible for the number of inches of the rainfall. It can only be done by the same attribution of miraculous power over the forces of Nature which made some native papers lay the great Assam earthquake of 1897, together with the visitations of famine and plague in that year, at the door of the British 'Raj.' Such an occurrence as the complete failure of rain never visits Western countries ; but in India, either partially or totally, it has happened but too often,

and it is most unfortunate that in the same country other conditions should also exist which make it most difficult to apply the remedies which at home (should such an unparalleled event occur) would be comparatively easy. For we must remember that the vast majority of the population, about 94 per cent., lives in scattered villages, most families owning or leasing their own plot of ground, upon the produce of which they live. Each man hopes to grow enough not only to feed himself and his family, and to provide seed for the next crop, but a little over, which he generally barter with the village shopkeeper in exchange for the few other necessities of his life, some clothes, a few simple household utensils and implements of husbandry. A good crop means comparative prosperity, and his children have extra sweetmeats and his wife another silver ornament or two. A bad harvest makes the pinch of want felt, but the total failure of crops can mean one thing only—utter ruin and starvation. For the peasant has nothing to fall back on—no capital, no savings, except what is represented by the silver anklets and bangles of the family, no market for his labour, no poor-law even as a last refuge.

Though, according to the best authorities, the condition of the people has almost everywhere improved immensely during the last forty or fifty years, thrift, as we understand it, is still practically unknown. No one makes a provision for sickness or old age, for he knows that in the last extremity he will always be provided for, better or worse, by those of his own family or caste, or by the doles of the rich. Private charity is almost boundless—witness the horde of religious mendicants who live by begging entirely. Only too often the peasant is already weighed down with a load of debt incurred when he married his daughter or buried his wife, or through bad harvests, floods, or other natural calamities. Sometimes he will have been obliged to sell his land altogether, and to become the hired servant of the new owner. This is happening to such a great and serious extent that legislation is now being contemplated to prevent the alienation of land from the peasant proprietors on such a large scale.

To such a population what does the failure of rain then mean? It implies the loss of crops and, as a necessary result, starvation, unless help is given. As soon as it is seen that the rains will be bad, prices begin to go up and the peasant reduces his daily allowance of food. First his scanty reserve stock goes, then the grain kept for seed, then he parts with his few possessions, and meanwhile, his cattle grow steadily thinner as the grass dries up

and finally dwindle and die. If a man has got together a little store he is often tempted by the high price he can get for his grain to sell it, only to find a little later that he must buy back for his own needs at a still higher price. Soon too the townspeople, the artisans, and other non-agriculturists begin to feel the pinch; for grain, the one staple food, whether it be rice, millet, wheat or barley, rises steadily in price till it is often three or four times its usual price. Think what it would mean to English working people if bread quadrupled in price! Such a state of things is inconceivable to us. But the Indian sees starvation approaching with rapid footsteps and settles down with the quiet apathy of despair to meet his fate. 'If it is the will of God that we must die, then what can we do?' he says; and so death, that most cruel death by slow starvation, finds him stolidly waiting. So it has been for centuries, and in a year of such widespread calamity as this, death would have gathered in its millions but for the strong arm now stretched out to interpose and snatch away the prey.

For what is Government doing meanwhile? For many years past a system of famine relief has been steadily, carefully elaborated—experience has been slowly gained, the Famine Insurance Fund has been quietly growing—district after district has been saved from all possibility of famine by wells, tanks, canals. The 'Famine Code' has been compiled and the minutest regulations been laid down for dealing with almost every possible contingency. As soon as it is seen that distress is impending, every officer in charge of a 'district' (which roughly corresponds as to size and population to an English county) is required to furnish particulars showing what are the prospects of the crops in his district, if there is likely to be scarcity, how many people will probably be affected, what works of public utility can be commenced as relief works, the probable amount of money required, &c., &c. As the season progresses all necessary arrangements are quietly made, and at the first hint of serious want the machinery is all ready to be set in motion. The Governor or Lieutenant-Governor of every province has a complete scheme drawn up, and knows in one moment where the pressure is likely to be greatest, and where most men and money are needed. Of course such perfection of system has not been attained in a day. One of the great famines of the last half century was conducted with a greater eye to economy than to efficiency of relief; in another no lives practically were lost, but money was poured out like water. Now we have learned by the experience of the past, and

probably this famine will 'break the record,' even of that of 1897, for good and businesslike administration. The key-note of the system is 'no life shall be lost if human effort and money can prevent it. Government holds itself responsible for the duty of supplying food to all who need it.' But the difficulties to be contended with are enormous.

First there is the great reluctance of many natives, particularly such half-civilised tribes as the Bhils, to apply for relief. They have the greatest horror of leaving their native places except in the last extremity. It happens therefore that families will cling to their homes till absolutely the last grain of food is eaten, and then when they do start out to go to relief works, which may be twenty or thirty miles off, they are so weakened by long semi-starvation that they sink and die by the way, or if they do reach their destination the first good meal, unless most carefully administered, kills them. Sometimes the men of a family desert the women and children, and as a respectable woman would often sooner die than leave her house and seek for relief at the hands of male officials (who are in most cases the only people available for relief work), they stay quietly in the seclusion of their zenanas and die for want of the food which is perhaps being distributed half a mile away.

Again, the difficulties of transport are quite incredible. Though India is as large as the whole of Europe, excluding Russia, its railway mileage is roughly just that of the British Isles alone. Metalled roads are few and far between. Most roads are merely rough tracks over which a bullock cart can travel at the rate of two miles an hour. And not even bullock transport is always available. Sometimes one must depend on camels alone, and in times of scarcity naturally all animals are difficult to procure and keep owing to lack of forage. There are therefore thousands of villages whose only means of communication with the railway is by perhaps eighty or a hundred miles of a rough, rutty track, quite impracticable for any large vehicles. Hence the great difficulty of carrying food to the starving population as long as they are scattered all over the country. They must, as far as possible, be collected in large camps which are fairly accessible.

Another obstacle lies in the fewness of the people available for giving relief or superintending relief works. We, who are overdone with charitable societies, each with its complicated machinery and hosts of paid and unpaid workers, cannot realise what it is to

have suddenly to dispense charity to millions of people with practically no organisation but that of the Government to do it. Missionaries, it is true, do assist most nobly ; but, with few exceptions, they live in towns, and are not available for the more difficult work in the scattered villages where, as has been said, ninety-four per cent. of the population is found. No ; the work has to be undertaken by the ordinary officials in addition to their usual work. The Collector or Deputy-Commissioner, as the head of a 'district' is called, is personally responsible in the first instance. Under him are a crowd of assistants, nearly all native, with a few military officers, engineers, and doctors who are borrowed for the occasion, but all doing relief work in addition to, or to the neglect of, their ordinary duties.

In 1897, when there was the complication of plague, famine, and war all occurring together, the strain on the *personnel* of the various services became very great. Of doctors particularly there was a great lack, as the number which plague-work alone absorbs is enormous. Practically every large railway station had one if not two doctors constantly engaged in examining passengers, and thus preventing those with incipient plague from spreading the disease wholesale. We are learning now what the medical needs of a campaign are ; and famine works require constant medical supervision, or large numbers of lives would be lost through injudicious feeding, or through outbreaks of diseases such as cholera, which are very apt to occur where large numbers of ill-fed natives are herded together. If native agents were thoroughly reliable, the work would be enormously simplified ; but, alas for human nature ! even a famine may be used as a means of fortune-making. If the distribution of money and grain is left entirely in the hands of native subordinates, it is too often found that a certain quantity is quietly abstracted before it reaches the starving multitude, or such tricks are resorted to as substituting a certain proportion of dust or sawdust for the equivalent in good flour. Even parents cannot be trusted to feed their own children, and so kitchens must be established where the babies can be collected and fed twice a day under the eyes of trustworthy overseers.

And here some idea may be given of the system adopted by the Government. As has been shown, it is *money* that the people lack wherewith to buy food ; not that there is an actual deficiency of food-stuffs, for though the crops of one province may fail entirely, there is probably a surplus in another, which becomes

available for exportation. For example, in the famine of 1897, the rice crop of Burma was unusually large, and so vast quantities were shipped across to Bengal. The Punjab usually sends thousands of tons of wheat to England, but, if necessary, they can be kept in the country for use in famine-stricken districts. The native grain-sellers are very quick to see where food materials can be sold to the best advantage; and it has been found that, on the whole, it is best to leave the questions of distribution and price largely to be regulated by the simple laws of supply and demand. It is sometimes suggested that the Government should fix a price for grain, but this would probably lead to concealment of it on such a large scale that no good end would be attained. What is done, therefore, is to furnish every able-bodied person with the means of earning enough money to buy what is necessary to support life. Camps are established to which every one is admitted on the sole condition that those who can work should do so. This work generally takes the form of digging canals, tanks, or wells, or making roads. In any case it is always sought to find something which shall be permanently useful to the district. Men, women, and children have each their scale of payment, and for the day's wage can buy the day's food. A man's pay is generally about 2*d.*, a child's about 1*d.*, and on this all can live, if not luxuriously, yet sufficiently. The tasks are necessarily light, as the physique of most of the workers is miserable; and relief works are therefore anything but cheap. Those who cannot work—the aged, the sick, and the very young—are fed gratuitously.

It can easily be imagined what good organisation is required to manage satisfactorily a camp of, say, 5,000 people. It is necessary, for example, to fix the scale of wages so accurately that all shall be able to live, and yet that no workers should be attracted who could get work elsewhere. It is the same problem which besets poor-law guardians at home, who dare not make the workhouse too attractive to the shiftless poor. Then tasks must be allotted according to strength; a good system of payment inaugurated, so that falsification of accounts and dodges to obtain double payment on the part of the workers are made difficult; families and castes must be sorted out; medical relief organised; and, not least, it must be made certain that sufficient food-stuffs are being brought into the district. The labour involved is enormous. Who that has read 'William the Conqueror' can forget 'Bakri Scott' and Sir Jim's epitome of his week's work? 'Forty miles in two days with twelve carts; two days' halt build-

ing a famine-shed; then forty miles back again, loading six carts on the way, and distributing all Sunday. Then, in the evening, he pitches in a 20-page demi-official to me, saying that the people where he is might be "advantageously employed on relief work," and suggesting that he put 'em to work on some broken-down old reservoir he's discovered, so as to have a good water-supply when the rains come.' What Scott did, and even more, that dozens of officials are doing now in every province of India. All Anglo-Indians are not of the type of the place-seekers and idle report-writers of which we are sometimes told Simla is so full; and it is a pity that the public imagination has taken hold of such doubtful types as Mrs. Hawksbee and Mrs. Reiver as representing female 'society,' and takes small account of 'William' and 'Lady Jim,' who have probably scores of prototypes in real life.

A missionary, speaking in London lately, said 'that British officials were sometimes described as lording it over the Indian people without sympathy or interest. He wished to contradict this in the most emphatic way. During the last famine many officials who made little profession of religious belief had practically laid down their lives for the suffering natives. Very few missionaries could show a record of self-sacrifice equal to that of Government officials.' This is strong testimony from an outsider, but probably none too strong, when it is considered how arduous is the work involved and how terrible are the scenes witnessed. If by chance cholera breaks out in a camp, the workers probably die by scores a day of that most terrible disease, and the panic that sets in sends terror-stricken creatures flying helter-skelter into the surrounding foodless district, where they must be followed, arrangements made for feeding them, the dead buried, the dying tended, and all perhaps with the aid of only one doctor and two or three trembling native apothecaries.

When the rains at last come the camps are broken up to a certain extent, as the people are anxious to go to their homes to begin preparing the ground for the new crops. But in the meantime they must still be supplied with food, and elaborate arrangements are needed for providing seed-grain and bullocks for ploughing. For this latter purpose the charitable fund is largely used, but Government also advances money, which is often not repaid. Then there remains a large number of orphans to be disposed of, either by adoption by respectable natives or by handing over to missionary societies. Finally, the remission of the revenue generally drawn from the land has to be considered

on a large scale. And then 'all is over except the shouting,' as Sir Jim said. All is over, but many thousands of lives have inevitably been lost, the peasant misses what little he once possessed of simple comforts, the revenue is the poorer by several millions sterling, the Civil Service has lost some of its best and hardest workers, victims of cholera and fever and exposure to the sun.

England is strangely oblivious of some of her servants. She greets with acclamation the man who has saved the life of a wounded comrade on the battlefield, or held a position swept by shell and bullet fire for a few hours or days. She honours with almost superstitious reverence the magic letters 'V.C.' but of the men who have saved thousands from a horrible death, who have faced death from the most ghastly of diseases with quiet English pluck, who look for nothing better in the shape of a reward than a chance to get a hot weather in the hills, or an extra six months' leave for a run to England to see children they can no longer recognise, what does she care for them? There will be a list of C.I.E.'s and C.S.I.'s and awards of the Kaiser-i-Hind medal amongst next New Year's Day honours; but for what services they are conferred, and how hardly they have been won, the British public will concern itself not at all. It is satisfied to know vaguely that England has done her duty by the subject races of India, though not in the least averse to listen to any suggestion that we might prevent famines altogether if we chose to do so. Of what we have done to prevent and mitigate it, probably few are aware. It sounds appalling to hear of six millions of people requiring relief, but what of the two hundred and ninety-four millions who are *not* requiring it? The proportion is roughly the same as that of the number of paupers receiving relief in London, at any given time to the total population.

The 'Pax Britannica' has allowed the population of India to increase so greatly that its density is almost double that of France; but the best authorities agree in declaring that the prosperity of the country has advanced to such a degree that in many places it is three- and four-fold what it was fifty years ago.

As to direct prevention of famine, though it is obviously impossible to control the rainfall, we have done much to increase artificial means of irrigation. For more than twenty years a portion of the surplus revenue has been set aside for a 'Famine Insurance Fund,' and has been spent not only on actual relief of distress when it occurs, but on canals, tanks, railways, and roads,

and on the lightening of the public burdens, so that, should extra taxation be ever necessary in an emergency, the indebtedness of the country should not on the whole increase. From this and other funds we have spent on canals (mostly during the last fifty years) about 48,000,000*l.*, and 36,000 miles of canals are now open. On railways up to the year 1888 about 155,000,000*l.* had been spent. The result is seen in provinces like Sindh, once an arid desert, but now capable of cultivation, and supporting two million people; in parts of the Punjab, which have become quite independent of the rainfall; in Madras, where irrigation has often more than quadrupled the value of land; and like effects in many other districts. Unfortunately, irrigation is not a panacea of universal application. In a hilly country like much of Central India, canals are impossible. The small rivers, which are alone available for feeding some canals, dry up entirely in seasons of drought, and so do also tanks, reservoirs, and wells. Science cannot yet entirely subdue the forces of Nature.

There remains, then, the grim fact that famines always have occurred in India as far back as history can trace, and they probably always will occur more or less severely. Meanwhile let it be a consolation to those who have some feeling for that unhappy country to know that what money, skill, and hard work can do to mitigate its sufferings at the present moment, that is being done according to the best traditions of English public service, and what higher standard could be attained?

G. BRADSHAW.

A Link with the Past.

EVERY now and then, as the fancy moved me, I would go to 'read the Word,' as she put it, to old Miss Bredon. The attraction, I have to confess, lay not altogether in the prospect of expounding the Scripture, but more largely in the singular interest of Miss Bredon's conversation, her remarkable stock of information, and original points of view and comments. There was something in her life not much less than heroic, entitling her to a high place among the saints of labour. She lived now in a very neat cottage, a niece, who was just through her standards, coming in every day to help her with the chores and perhaps a bit of cooking. With regard to her age she was a little hazy, but put it somewhere between eighty and ninety, with a leaning to the more venerable figure. In very early childhood she had been left an orphan, and went out, as soon as she was able for any work, 'standards' being no consideration in those good old times, as servant first in one and then in another farmhouse. 'From there I went,' she said, 'as servant in a gentfolk's house, and after that I was housekeeper to a lady as left me the chaney and the burry.' The 'burry,' or bureau, is a perfect treasure in black oak, and the china a constant occasion to me of covetousness. 'And all the while,' she went on, 'I was saving the money to buy this house where I've been ever since and shall be till I'm took. It was at L——, the farmhouse was, where first I went out to service. Have you ever been to L——?'

'Yes!' I said, 'I've bicycled over there.'

'Oh! do you ride them wheels?' she answered, slightly shocked I think.

'Yes,' I said, 'it's wonderful how it helps one to get about.'

'Aye,' she replied, 'so it be. It be wonderful how folks get about nowadays, so it be. Why, in my young days I mind as it was strange to meet one as had been beyond the next parish.'

‘I suppose,’ I said, ‘that you can remember the time before there were any trains?’

‘Me remember? I should hope as I could remember, just as well as you’re a-sitting there. It was in the second place as I was in, out at service, with a farmer’s family—a very nice farmer’s family they was—people that would keep their carriage nowadays, I’ve no doubt they would, and their pianner.’

Punctuation of the old lady’s style of narrative is difficult, but probably the pause here is best represented by a full stop, for a new sentence began itself before the last found its grammatical termination.

‘That was out L—— way, where you was saying as you’d been on them wheels. We was sitting around the table—masters and mistresses and servants used to sit round the table in the kitchen together in those days to save lighting—we used to make the rushlights (there warn’t no candles in those days) from the sheep’s fat with a rush run through it when it was melted. That was five years before King William died, I remember well; and master, he came in from market and he set himself down by the tea-table, and he says, “Dame”—that was to his wife—“what do you think as I heard at the market to-day?” And she says, “I don’t know, Master.” And he says to me, “Girl! what do you think I heard?” and I says, “I don’t know.” And he says, “I heard as in foreign parts they has carriages as goes without no horses,” and at that Missus she just put her hands into the air and she says, “There! It aint possible, Master.” And he says, “It is possible, for they tells me as it is so in foreign parts, and, what’s more, may be as you’ll live to see it yourself too, here.” And she says, “I hope as your head’ll never ache before I do see it;” and if you’ll believe me, before thirty years there was one of those carriages without horses, what they calls trains now, going past her very door on her own hired land.’

It seemed to take one back a very long way, into quite a previous state of affairs, this scene of the farmer and his wife and the servant sitting together round the kitchen table by the light of one home-made rush dip, ‘five years before William the Fourth died.’ That fixed the date very certainly in the lady’s mind. Eight shillings a week, she told me, was the labourer’s wage in those days. ‘We used to live more plainly then. Lisa [that was her niece], she wouldn’t look at the food as we were used to eat then. We never had no meat hardly, unless it was Sundays, or maybe a bit of bacon; but mostly it was turnips or else potatoes,

and bread. But I don't know as we was any the worse for it. I think it's good to live plainly. And we dressed in homespun, not in them things that is made out of a mill and comes in pieces the third or fourth time of their wearing'—this with immense scorn, for she has no opinion of most modern improvements, although holding 'edication' in immense respect—'I had one homespun dress as I wore ten years, and then it wasn't finished, but was given away to a beggar woman.'

'But, I suppose,' I said, 'you saw the picture of a train in the paper before it came to you?'

'Papers!' she answered, in scorching scorn of my ignorance, 'there wasn't no papers in those days. Leastways, the farmer folk never saw no papers. Lords and ladies, maybe, might have had them. We didn't see so much as a square inch of paper from year's end to year's end, and if we did see so much as a square inch it was treasured up like, and put away like a curiosity.'

'But what did you light the fires with?'

'Straw, to be sure—straw and bits of sticks. Wood fires, you'll understand. There was no coals in those days, except in the towns may be. We never had no coals in farmers' houses. And another thing, it'll maybe surprise you to hear we never had—that's soap.'

'What, no soap?' I said, conscious of classical quotation; 'but what did you do then? How did you wash the clothes?'

'Wood ashes, bless you; wood ashes in a trough [pronounced to rhyme with 'bough']. 'You'd put the clothes in a trough and strike the wood ashes over them, and then sloush the water over them; and then wood ashes again, and sloush them again, till they was clean. There wasn't no soap. You see I've changed them wristbands.'

This observation, thrown out without apparent consequence across the stream of narration, was reminiscent of a former conversation on occasion of a visit a few weeks before, when she had said suddenly, with her characteristic abruptness, 'How do you like my dress?'

I had said, what was but bare truth, that it was a marvel of neatness, everything about this old lady being spick and span, in her person, her cottage, and all belongings.

'Well, I'm glad to hear you do,' she said, 'I don't. I don't like to think of these wristbands being so shabby,' holding out her thin wrinkled hands for me to see them.

I was slightly shocked. I had not suspected my old friend of

so much personal vanity. 'You do not see a great many people here,' I said, by way of saying something.

'Tain't that,' she replied, with blighting scorn again. 'Do you think as I care for the people, even if there was any? 'Tain't that, but it is that when the good Lord takes me I couldn't bear for Him to see me with the shabby wristbands.'

'Oh, but I don't suppose we shall appear before Him like that,' I said, 'with the clothes we're in now.'

'We shall,' she affirmed with conviction. 'Ah, you're young. You don't understand. But I'm old, and I've been thinking it all out, and that's how it will be. We shall appear, you in that sailor hat you're wearing, and me in these shabby wristbands, just the same as the things we was wearing when we's took.' She wagged her head from side to side so sapiently, it was impossible to contradict her. 'I've been a hard-working woman all my life,' she added simply, 'and I couldn't abear for Him to find me shabby when I'm atook.'

'But He will know how hard you've worked, Miss Bredon,' I said.

'Yes,' she admitted, 'may be. But He might forget.'

Perfectly charming and very touching is the simplicity of the poor folks' faith. It all presents no difficulties, no problems to them. Its value for the comfort of their lives is incalculable. It more than makes up for all the lacks and hardships; which, after all, are not lacks and hardships to them, because they do not recognise them.

We turned then to a little reading of 'the Word.' 'I read it by myself, you know, sometimes,' she said, 'but it do take me so long. A whole day it do take me to read a page of it, and there's that Lisa,' the little niece who came in to do her chores, 'she do read it off so peart. But I do like your reading of it best—not that I understand it all, but you are able to explain it to me.'

'Ah, but you are old, Miss Bredon,' I said, 'and I am young, as you have told me. I think it's you that ought to be able to explain it to me. You've had so much more experience.'

'Ah, but you've had the ediccation. It is a wonderful thing the ediccation. Well, good-bye. Come and see me again whenever you've a mind to. I'm always glad to see you.'

A mighty deal this for the old lady to say by way of welcome or invitation. It had been a hard, self-sufficient, self-respecting, plucky life—a life that had left the old lady with little disposition to blandishment now that it was drawing to its close. She was not

neighbourly—of too independent a spirit and too brusque a manner to be a social success in her class ; and social success was the last thing she was likely to make her aim. It was a life that was a veritable triumph, for all that. The cottage, the china, the ‘burry,’ and the wristbands were a triumphal crown of achievement considering the beginnings from which they started and the absolute singlehandedness of the struggle. To me she remains delightful and unique, a link with a past time, ‘five years before King William died,’ and with another class of life no less remote from our own than that date is remote. I visit at other houses where they receive one with more ‘style,’ more powder, more footmen, and the rest of it, but I do not know of one other house where I get such good entertainment from my hostess.

HORACE G. HUTCHINSON.

In the Name of a Woman.

BY ARTHUR W. MARCHMONT,

AUTHOR OF 'BY RIGHT OF SWORD,' 'A DASH FOR A THRONE,' &c.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

ALTHOUGH I was certain that we were rushing straight upon inevitable capture, I still had it in my mind to make a strenuous dash to get through the soldiers, and I flogged the horses vigorously, and told my companion to cling hard to her seat, for the cart swayed and bumped and jolted over the rough road in a manner that threatened to send us sprawling into the lane at every second.

'Draw that hood over your face to conceal it as much as possible, and remember if we are caught I shall address you as "the Princess,"' I said to my companion. 'I can't tell you now what I think of your courage.'

She did what I asked, and her features were so concealed that, had the troopers known the Princess by sight, they could not have seen it was not she by my side.

The first party numbered under a dozen men, and as we approached they made no effort to stop us, but drew their horses aside and let us pass.

'Are they following us?' I asked anxiously, for that would be the test whether my ruse was to fail or succeed.

The girl glanced back.

'Yes. They've closed in behind and are galloping after us.'

'Thank God for that!' I cried; and I laid the whip on the horses again till they were travelling at headlong, desperate, racing speed.

Then in the mist, as we neared the end of the lane, I saw the

main body drawn up in a mass completely blocking the road. They had evidently heard us coming and were prepared for us, and they sat on their horses with their carbines levelled.

'Halt there! or we fire,' shouted someone.

But he might as well have shouted to a mountain torrent to stop; for my horses were smarting under the whip I had laid on so generously, and no driver on earth could have stayed their wild rush. Indeed, the words were scarcely out of his lips before we plunged madly right into the midst of them, scattering them to right and left and sending them cannoning one against the other in the utmost confusion.

The officer in command had formed them in a bad order for such a reckless charge as ours. The chief strength was at the sides, and in the middle, where our horses by luck carried us, the line was only two deep.

The check was thus but momentary. There was a violent shock as we dashed against the first horseman; my horses stumbled, and I thought would fall. My companion and I were jerked violently forward nearly on to their backs, but in a second and scarcely with a pause they recovered, and before I could realise what had happened we were through the ranks and clear of them, with Spernow and another man close behind us and dashing along again with barely abated fury for the main road.

'Lie down on the floor of the cart; they may fire after us,' I cried. The next instant the guns rang out and the bullets came whistling past our ears. But the aim was bad, and the jolting and swaying of the cart as it lunged over the ruts helped us.

'Are you all right, Spernow?' I called over my shoulder.

'Yes, but I am alone. The two behind me were stopped in that business just now, and the other has just gone down. By God, it was splendidly done, Count. But they're streaming after us in full cry.'

I was nearing the corner now, and remembered the sharp awkward turn with something of a shudder. I did not care which way we went; but the cattle knew the road and seemed to care, for they turned for their old stables at Liublian with a swerve that tilted the cart to such an angle that it was nothing less than a miracle that we did not upset.

It righted, however, and once on the main road we darted off on our mad flight at a speed which made the misty air sting my face with rushing damp in it.

I was right glad that we had turned that way. The men

behind would be sure to think I had taken it purposely, and thus we should draw off pursuit from Christina effectually; and every mile that we could now contrive to cover meant two miles' start for her.

The race could not continue for long. I knew that, and knew, too, how it must end unless some unforeseen accident happened; but I meant to make the most of the opportunity to lead the men as far from Christina as possible, and with this object I flogged the horses until they flew along like things possessed at such a speed that Spernow, though he was well mounted, could hardly keep up with us.

In this reckless way, up hill and down at the same headlong, breakneck pace, our limbs and lives at hazard with every bad bit of road we covered, we raced for some miles till we came to the foot of a steep hill, which, I remembered, was as long as it was steep. The horses charged at it in the same gallant, desperate way, but our pursuers had now gained on us and were closing up fast.

They had not fired another volley, and though at first I wondered at this, and could not guess the cause, I was soon to learn it. When we turned in the direction of Liublian they knew that we could not escape them, and were content to ride us down or wait till we ran against some other body of troops. The hill now helped them, for the wild pace had distressed my horses until they began to falter at the steep ascent, breathing hard. I flogged them unmercifully; I would have every yard out of them that was to be got, because it meant a yard longer start for Christina; but my heart was sore for the brutes, for they had made a valiant effort.

Before we reached the crest of the hill the troops were up with us, and the leader, pointing ahead, called to me to surrender.

'You had better give up the struggle, Count Benderoff,' he said, riding abreast of me. 'We have another body of men at the top there.'

But I was fighting for yards, and my answer was to cut the horses desperately with the whip, so that they sprang forward again with a last frantic effort. The man rode to the nearest horse, and, drawing his revolver, placed it close to the animal's head.

'I shall be sorry to fire, but if you don't stop I shall have no alternative,' he called.

'Shall we yield?' I said, turning to the little Broumoff, who

had maintained her seat unflinchingly, and pretending to consult her, while I whispered, 'Keep your face well concealed.'

She nodded, and I drew the horses to a standstill.

'We yield only under protest,' I said.

'I am glad you spared me an unpleasant job,' replied the officer, putting his revolver away, and saluting the Princess. 'Your animals have made a magnificent struggle, but you have been racing all the time toward certain capture, Count Benderoff. Escape from the first moment was hopeless.' We waited then in silence while his men drew up and surrounded us. 'Will you drive Her Highness into Liublian?'

All the horses were greatly distressed, and we waited a few minutes for them to recover, and then went forward at a slow pace. I had been anxious to hurry before, but now I kept my animals at the walk, and halted more than once on the steep hill. It was my cue now to waste as much time as possible before the identity of my companion should be discovered, and I thought with glee of the long start which Christina would have.

At the top of the hill the other soldiers met us, and the two officers spoke together for a minute, discussing the incidents of our capture. Then we went forward again at a very slow pace.

We reached Liublian an hour and a half after leaving the homestead; and there again fortune favoured us. No one was there to recognise my companion, and we had to push on to General Kolfort's house, still at a slow pace, for I declared my horses were so beaten they could not travel beyond a walk. I managed to occupy another hour over the drive, and with this start, which meant nearly five hours to Christina, I felt hopeful she would reach the frontier safely. My ruse had succeeded far beyond my best hopes.

As we drew up at the General's house, I smiled to myself as I pictured his fury at the discovery; but he was not there. He had returned hastily to Sofia, I overheard; but the place was packed with troops, and he had left some drastic orders for our disposal.

I helped the plucky little Broumoff from the cart with a very deferential air and led her into the house, Spornow in close attendance. They took us into a room on the ground floor, where three officers awaited us, one of them being Captain Wolasky, who, to my surprise, gave no response to my start of recognition.

A chair was placed for the 'Princess,' and she was shrewd

enough to seat herself so that the light of the lamp left her face in the shadow. I could have laughed at the comedy underlying the situation; but, assuming a tone of hot indignation, I exclaimed:

'I demand to know the reason why I am subjected to this infamous treatment! What is the meaning of this arrest?'

The man in the centre of the three looked up angrily:

'It is not in my instructions to give you any such needless information, sir. You must be fully aware of what you have done. You are the Count Benderoff?'

'I am the Hon. Gerald Winthrop, as well as the Count Benderoff, and a British subject.'

'Englishmen are much too prone to meddle in matters that don't concern them, and must be prepared to take the consequences,' he answered dryly.

'There may also be consequences for those who meddle with them,' I returned hotly; and with the object of provoking him into a personal dispute so as to waste more time, I poured out a volume of protests and objections, together with loud and angry demands for a specific charge; and in this way prolonged the wrangle for many minutes.

He ordered me at length to be silent, under threat of packing me out of the room, and then he turned to the 'Princess.'

'I much regret, Princess, to have to put you to inconvenience, but my instructions are imperative. You will have to remain in this house for the night; but arrangements have been made for your personal comfort, and to-morrow General Kolfort's intention will be explained to you.'

She made no reply other than to bow, as if in acquiescence.

'I must ask you to remove your disguise,' he said next, just as I was hoping she would even then escape recognition. She made no attempt to comply with the request, and it was repeated in a sharper tone.

She turned to me as if to ask what to do, and, seeing the end had come, I broke in:

'This is another of your ridiculous proceedings,' I said warmly. 'Not only am I personally treated in this outrageous manner, but, because I am seen driving on the highway, you must needs conclude that the Princess Christina is with me. It is shameful.'

'What do you mean, sir?' cried the officer hastily.

'Simply that this young lady is no more the Princess Christina than you are. You may as well draw your hood back to show

the mistake,' I added to Mademoiselle Broumoff, who did so then, to the complete consternation of all the three officers. I could have smiled at their utter bewilderment.

'Where is the Princess Christina?' asked the chief sternly.

'We are at least as anxious as you can be on that point,' I answered. 'If your men make blunders of this kind, and don't know the difference between Her Highness and her friends, who can tell where she is?'

'You will find it a hazardous work to play tricks on us!' he cried furiously.

'I play tricks on you, indeed! It is you who seem to be amusing yourselves with us,' I said, with an insolent laugh. 'But you will have to answer for it, I promise you.'

'Silence!' he shouted; and I shrugged my shoulders and threw up my hands in response.

He muttered some hurried instructions to Captain Wolasky, who left the room to carry them out. I glanced at my watch. It was a quarter to ten; three hours since Christina had started, and I calculated that, if all had gone well, she would be at least two stages to the frontier, and beyond hope of pursuit by any troops that could now be despatched after her. For aught else I cared nothing.

I edged close to Spornow, and managed to whisper to him:

'If you get a chance try to steal off, you two, in the confusion; and just as I had said this Captain Wolasky came back with a file of soldiers, and the officer at the table ordered them to lead me away.

'You have your orders, Captain Wolasky,' he said in sharp, peremptory tones; and I was led away, Wolasky following me.

He took me out through the hall, now thronged with soldiers, to the front of the house, where a small troop of horsemen were drawn up; and, then, halting at a spot where the light of a lamp fell full upon his face, he looked at me with a peculiar expression in his eyes which I did not understand, and said in an unnecessarily harsh, strident tone:

'You have played us too many tricks for me to dare to take your parole not to escape, sir; and if you are treated with indignity you have yourself to blame for it. Bind the prisoner's hands behind him!' he said roughly to a couple of men near; and a murmur of approval came from the troopers standing around, mingled with a good deal of strong Russian.

'I protest against the outrage!' I shouted, and commenced to struggle. It was useless, of course, and I was held, and my

hands fastened behind me. 'Where am I being taken? I demand to know!'

'I'll demand you,' said Wolasky, in a voice of passion; and, seizing me, he pushed me forward to where a horse stood riderless.

'Excuse this farce,' he whispered; 'but it is necessary;' and he covered the whisper with loud imprecation and abuse of me. I was so astonished that I forgot to resist. 'Struggle,' he whispered again; and then I set to work to play my part with a will, and fought and struggled so desperately as they were forcing me to mount, that the Captain appeared to lose his temper, and struck at me, taking care, however, that the blow spent itself in the air.

'Watch him,' he ordered, 'and at the least sign of treachery shoot him like a dog. It doesn't matter whether he reaches Tirnova alive or dead, so long as he does reach there;' and again some of the soldiers clustered about, laughed and oathed in evident glee.

I rode between two troopers, whose horses were fastened to mine by light chains attached to the bits, while each man held a rein; and, as we started in this alarming fashion, some ruffian shouted after us to keep the 'damned English dog safe on the chain.' 'Tie his legs under the horse's belly, and he'll keep on, dead or alive,' cried another; and a burst of ribald laughter followed, in which those about me joined.

In this fashion we rode through Liublian, struck off to the right, and soon after began the ascent of a steep hilly country, which made the travelling very slow. We moved at no more than a walking pace all the time, making, as I judged, about four miles an hour; but we kept on all through the night, and did not halt until the sun was up, and we reached a small village, where we dismounted and had breakfast.

I was overpowered with fatigue, and so soon as I had eaten the food brought to me I fell into a deep sleep. In about three hours I was awakened and the march resumed. The sun was overpowering, and towards midday a halt was called under some trees. Here again I slept, and when, in the late afternoon, I awoke, I was vastly refreshed, and began to think about the chances of escape.

I had been treated all the time with the sternest measures. The Captain did not come near me; and, when we halted, my legs were bound before my hands were liberated for me to take any food. The country was of course entirely strange, and when I asked a question of the men on either side of me they ordered me with an oath to be silent.

When the sun was getting low in the afternoon Captain Wolasky reined up to my side, and, pointing to a road we passed, he said in a jeering, insulting tone, but with the same expression I had noticed on his face the night before :

‘That’s the road you’d like to take, Mr. Count Englishman ; feast your eyes on it, for you won’t see it again, I promise you. See, it leads to Sofia over yonder ;’ and he pointed far away over the hills to where the sun’s rays were shining on some distant buildings.

I looked eagerly enough, for I thought I understood him, and I began to pay special heed to the road along which they took me.

‘It’s prettier scenery than Tirnova,’ he cried, with another loud jeering laugh, as he went on again to lead the party.

After that we travelled on a fairly level road for about two miles, when another halt was called for the soldiers’ evening meal. My legs were tied as before, and a good meal brought to me, and in moving to put away the cup and platter I noticed that my legs were fastened so loosely that I could slip them out in a moment.

The dusk had fallen, and the mist risen, so that the whole party were enveloped in gloom, and I heard the Captain say to the men, who were sitting at a short distance from me :

‘We’ve a long night ride, and I shan’t halt again before dawn. You’d better snatch an hour’s sleep.’

I saw in a moment that the whole thing had been arranged cleverly for my escape, and that the Captain himself had told me in his insulting tone the road I must make for. I threw myself back and pretended to sleep, and the man on guard over me—a fat, heavy fellow, whom the fatigue of the ride had already worn out—first satisfied himself that I was as sound asleep as I was when we had halted previously, and then curled himself up to follow my example.

With the greatest care I drew my legs out of their bonds and sat up. The men were breathing heavily in deep slumber, while the fellow close to me was snoring vigorously. I glanced around, and just above me on the road I should take was the Captain’s horse tethered alone. He was by far the fleetest and best-blooded animal in the troop, and once on his back I could laugh at pursuit. That he had been left there was due to no accident, I was convinced ; and stealthily, inch by inch, holding my breath in my excitement, I began to crawl toward him.

I reached him unnoticed, and, stroking his neck, I cast off the

tether, and led him away for a few paces along the soft turf. All was dead silence in the little camp of sleepers, and in the murky mist I could see nothing of them and they could see nothing of me.

I led the horse until I reckoned to be out of earshot, and then mounted and set off at a canter, keeping on the turf as long as possible.

Suddenly a loud shout behind me from the men announced that the fact of my escape had been discovered, and, driving my heels into the horse's side, I dashed off at a rapid gallop for the road which Captain Wolasky had said was the route to Sofia. I found it without difficulty, of course, and paused a moment at the turning to listen for signs of pursuit.

I could hear nothing, but resolved to make the best of my start, and galloped off at a pace which showed the splendid quality of the animal under me.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A FEARSOME DILEMMA.

As I plunged along in my wild ride through the quickly darkening gloom, I began to take stock of my position and shape some kind of plans. Beyond the statement that the lane would lead me to Sofia, I had not a notion of where I was, and the twists and turns of the road along which I was galloping madly soon caused me to lose all knowledge of the direction in which Sofia lay.

But this did not trouble me very much. I was mounted on a splendid animal; I was armed, for I found the Captain's revolver in the holster; and I had money in my pockets enough to more than serve any needs likely to arise.

I did not much fear any serious pursuit. The same timely friendship which had led Captain Wolasky to venture so much for me would, I was sure, suffice to induce him to lead the pursuit in any direction but that which he knew I should take; and after I had covered a few miles I halted and listened again for any sounds of followers. There was not a sound, and after that I determined to proceed leisurely, and so spare my horse for any effort should I stumble across any patrolling party of troops.

My wish was, of course, to push for the frontier; but, as the

city lay between me and the west road, and as moreover I knew neither how to find a way round the city, and thus avoid the risk of crossing it, nor my road to the frontier, should I ever be able to get through Sofia safely, I was much puzzled what course to take.

I could of course trust to the chance of being able to make inquiries as I went, but there was so much risk in such a course that I feared it. If I was to get through safely, I knew I must ride for the most part at night, because the daylight spelt a double danger to me. It was practically certain that the main road would be infested by Kolfort's men, and the chances of my being able to evade them all were infinitesimal.

Another scheme suggested itself to me—hazardous, no doubt—but possibly not so dangerous as the alternative. Markov had given me a plan of his route to the frontier, with a list of the places and persons where he had arranged for the relays of horses; but in the confusion and hurry of my departure from Sofia I had left this behind me. It was not of much consequence so long as he had been present to act as guide, but without him it had become of vital importance. My present idea was therefore to risk a return to my own house, get the paper, which was locked up in a secret cabinet in my library, and perhaps remain hidden in the house during the following day, setting out on my journey to the frontier when darkness came to help me.

The obstacle to the scheme was, of course, the possibility that my house might be in the possession of Kolfort's agents, and that I might run my head into a trap. But the house contained so many secret ways and passages that this risk was greatly lessened; and I reckoned that I could at least effect an entrance without being discovered, and if I found the project impossible could leave it again. In any case, the possession of the plan of route was so essential to me under the circumstances that I made up my mind to run the risk of the venture.

I had first to find my way to the city, however, and in this I was singularly fortunate. I had ridden some three or four hours when the moon rose, and soon afterwards, to my intense satisfaction, my cross road came out at a point which I recognised as being some four or five miles from my house. I quickened my pace, therefore, riding very warily, and, wherever possible, cantering on the turf, until I came out on the heath which was close to the mouth of the underground passage leading under my grounds. I would not trust myself to use that, because its secret was known

to Kolfort's agents; but I chose a path which led me to another gate of the garden.

I dismounted there, unlocked the gate, drew my horse under the shadow of some trees, fastened him, and, thrusting the revolver into my belt for use in case of need, crept forward to reconnoitre the house.

Every window at the back was in darkness, even to the kitchens, and the place seemed empty and deserted. Keeping well within the shadow of the walls, I stole round with the utmost caution to the front, taking care that every footfall should be deadened by either the turf or the soft mould of the flower beds.

In the front there was a faint light from one window; a carriage stood in the roadway, and, near the gates opening from the drive, I saw one or two moving shadows of men.

The carriage surprised and startled me. Obviously someone was taking a keen interest in my concerns, and was inside the house; and I had to consider whether I dared to venture any further with my plan in the face of such added danger. A minute's thought determined me to proceed, however. What I had feared was the presence of a fairly large number of men holding possession of the house; but there was no sign of this, and if only one or two attendants were with this visitor, whoever it might be, they would not have an easy task to capture me, while I should not have a difficult one to avoid them.

At the side where I stood there was a small opening into a passage that led straight to my library, and, unlocking it very softly, I entered, and stole along it on tiptoe, feeling my way by the wall in the pitchy darkness. There were several doors leading off from the narrow passage to different parts of the house, and at each of these I stood and listened intently, venturing to unlock one or two of them with my master-key. In this way I was able to satisfy myself that not a soul was in the lower part of the house, and, assured by this knowledge, I crept up the stone staircase that led to the library.

The need for absolute silence on my part increased with every step, and when I reached the top I drew off my heavy riding boots and moved at a snail's pace, my stockinged feet making no noise whatever.

The entrance to the passage from the room had been masked very cleverly. It was formed by a revolving panel in the wall, which swung on well-oiled pivots and opened behind a sham cabinet, through the painted glass doors of which care had been

taken to allow of anyone who stood in the cabinet both hearing and seeing all that went on in the room. I moved the panel inch by inch with infinite care and caution, and as I did so heard the sound of voices.

I started, and almost lost my presence of mind as I recognised the deep, gruff tone of General Kolfort, followed by the soft, dulcet, seductive laugh of the Countess Bokara. Passing noiselessly through the panel, I entered the cabinet, and the sight that met my eyes made me almost cry out in astonishment.

The wily old Russian had for once met more than his match. He was seated in a chair with his arms fastened behind the back of it, staring up, with leaden face and fear-filled eyes, into the face of the woman who stood over him with a long, deadly-looking dagger in her raised hand, passion and hate blazing in her eyes, and making the blade tremble in her grasp so that the light quivered and danced on the steel as the taunting, scoffing words flowed volubly from her lips.

'Yes, you are to die. I lured you here for the purpose—lured you, as you say, with lies about the secret proofs of this Count's guilt which I could put into your hands. A single movement, and my blade strikes home to its sheath in your treacherous old heart!'

The words came through her clenched teeth, and she looked a very she-devil as she gloated over her helpless and cowering victim. He might well cower, for if ever the lust for human blood was written on a human face, it was there in every line of hers.

'What do you want?' he asked at length.

'Nothing but revenge. Nothing but that you shall feel before you die some of the pain and horror you and your cursed agents and spies have made my Prince endure for months past; nothing but to know that at last our accounts are squared, and what you tried and failed to do with me I have tried and succeeded in doing with you; nothing but your life, murderer!'

'You can name your own terms,' he said again; and I saw him glance about him as if in desperate search of some faint hope of escape from the menacing knife. She saw the glance too, and laughed, a fiend's laugh, scornful, sneering, and utterly loathsome.

'You may look where you will, but you remember your own condition—alone in the house. Alone, that you might not be seen with me, or perhaps might trap me with more of your damnable treachery. Well, you've had your way, and we are

alone; but it's the trapper who is trapped, the spider who is caught in his own web. I'm glad you are afraid of death. I thought it would be so, you are so prompt and quick to order the deaths of others. And now you want to find proofs that will enable you to have this Englishman put out of your way, something to give a colour to your order for his removal; and when your men had searched here and found nothing strong enough, you swallowed the bait I put to you, to guide you to the place where you should find all you wanted and more.'

'He is no friend of yours.'

'What is that to me? You are my enemy, and here helpless in my power. The great, powerful, ruthless, implacable enemy of my Prince and of Bulgaria here alone, fastened like a child to a chair by the hand of a woman. Where is your power now? Will it help you to unfasten even a strand of your bonds? Will it bring a single soul to your aid? Will it stay by a second the plunge of my knife, or turn by so much as a hair's breadth the point from your heart? Were you as feeble as the meanest and weakest of your victims, you could not be more helpless than alone here with me.'

The bloodthirsty fury of this unsexed demon was a hateful sight. Had she plunged her knife into the man's heart in a paroxysm of rage I could have understood the passion which impelled her to her act of revenge, but it was loathsome to see her standing gloating over the wretched, quivering old man. I made up my mind to stop her; and I was about to dash into the room to tear the knife from her grasp, for I could stand the sight no longer, when a thought inspired by his fear struck me. Like a flash of light a way to safety for me darted into my mind. If he was the coward at heart she had proved him I could turn his fears to good account, and in a moment I turned as anxious to save his life as I was to end the intolerable sight of her cruel, tigerish, callous gloating.

'You have tried to murder my Prince, and now you have dragged him from his throne to some of your vile Russian prisons,' she began again, when I burst open the doors of my hiding-place, darted upon her before she could recover from her start of surprise, and, pushing her back, stood between her and the General.

'You!' she cried in a voice choking with baffled passion, and looking for all the world as though she would spring on me.

'Silence!' I said sternly. 'This has gone on too long already. I will have no murder of this kind done here.'

I heard the old man behind me give a deep sigh of relief, and, glancing round, I saw that his head had dropped back on his shoulders. He had fainted in the sudden relaxation of the terrible strain, and with his dead white face upturned, open-mouthed and staring-eyed, he looked like a corpse.

But I could give him no more than a glance, for I dared not keep my eyes from the wild woman before me.

'You know he came here to find proofs to justify him in ordering your death?'

'I heard you taunt him with it just now; but I can protect myself.'

'I did not come to kill him for that.'

'I care nothing for your motives; I will not have him killed here,' I returned in the same stern, decisive tone.

She eyed me viciously, like a balked tigress.

'You will not?' The words came in a low, strenuous, menacing voice that fitted with her tigress look.

'No, I will not;' and at that, without another word, she flung herself upon me, wrought up to such a pitch of madness in her reckless yearning to do the deed she had come to do upon Kolfort that she would have plunged the knife into my heart to clear me out of her path. She struggled with the strength and frenzy of madness, turning the knife as I clutched and held her wrist until it gashed my hand, while she strained every nerve and muscle of her lithe, active body in the desperate efforts to get past me and wrench her wrist from my grip.

She was now in all truth a madwoman.

It was a grim, fierce, gruesome struggle, for her strength was at all times far beyond that of a woman, and her mania increased it until I could scarce hold her in check. Had I been a less powerful man she would certainly have beaten me; but I thrust her away again, though I could not get the dagger from her, and was preparing myself for a renewal of the struggle, when, with a scream for help that resounded through the house, she turned her wild eyes on me, now gleaming with her madness, and hissed:

'He seeks the proofs to kill you! He shall have them in my dead body! My blood is on you! My murder shall give him the proofs he needs!'

She cried again for help in the same ear-piercing screech; and, before I could devise her meaning, she turned the blade against herself, plunged it into her own heart, and, with a last half-finished scream, fell to the floor with a sickening thud.

In an instant I saw the method in her madness. The General had seen me in the room; he was now unconscious; there was no witness of her self-murder; my hand was streaming with the blood from the gashes of her knife; it was in my house it happened; her screams for help must have been heard outside. The suggestive proofs that I had slain her were enough to convince anyone of my guilt, and in another moment I should have the General's men thundering at the door, not only to stop my flight, but to have me denounced as a murderer.

Surely never was a man in a more desperate plight, and for the moment I knew not in my desperation what to do.

A glance at General Kolfort showed me he was still unconscious, and I rushed to him and shook him in the frenzy of my despair. But he gave no sign of returning consciousness, and the white face rolled from side to side as the head shook nervelessly on the limp, flaccid neck.

I clenched my hands and breathed hard in my concentrated efforts to think coherently and form some plan of action, and I cursed aloud in my wrath the fiend of a woman who had brought me to this pass of peril. I had no thought for her, dead though she was, but wild, raging, impotent hate.

Mere flight was no use. If I were charged with this awful deed I should be proscribed as a murderer, and the charge would dog my footsteps wherever I went and rest on me always, till I should be dragged perhaps to a felon's death. These thoughts flashed like lightning through my mind in the seconds that followed, crazing, bewildering, and frightening me till the drops stood cold and thick on my brow and my hands grew clammy with the dew of fear.

Then came the sounds of men running on the gravel outside, and I listened to them in positively fascinated, helpless irresolution.

Another second and the men were knocking loudly at the house door; and still I could not move. My feet were chained by a palsy of fear to the floor, my breath came in gasps so that I was like to choke, and when the knocking was repeated I could do no more than turn and stare helplessly in the direction of the sound like a crazy idiot. My brain seemed to have stayed every function except to fill me with this awesome conviction of deadly inevitable peril.

The knocking was repeated for the third time, and I heard the voices of the men calling to be admitted. I felt that in a

minute more the end must come, and still I could do nothing but stare in imbecile apathy and wait for it.

Never can I efface the horror of that terrible moment.

Then suddenly it seemed to pass. I thought clearly again, the instincts of self-preservation reasserted themselves, and I cursed myself for the invaluable time I had lost.

But it might not even now be too late.

CHAPTER XXIX.

GENERAL KOLFORT TO THE RESCUE.

As I stood in a last second of desperate thought I heard the crash of glass, and knew the men were breaking into the house; and I knew, too, that another minute would see them in the room where I should be caught red-handed. The instant General Kolfort returned to consciousness he would be the first to denounce me, despite the fact that I had saved him from death. He would only too gladly use against me the awful proofs of my apparent guilt which the mad woman had afforded by her self-murder. It was just such a chance as he would welcome.

I dared not leave him behind me.

I seized him, and, tearing with the strength of passion at his bonds, tugged and wrenched until I freed his hands and lifted him in my arms. He was still faint, though I detected now the signs of returning consciousness. Then I extinguished the light, darted with him through the entrance into the secret passage, and, clapping a hand over his mouth that he should utter no sound when his senses came back, I drew my revolver, and, peering through the glass into the dark room, stood at bay, resolved to sell my life dearly, whatever chanced.

But I had secured a magnificent hostage for ultimate freedom, could I only get through this mess. It would all turn on what happened when the General's men entered the room, and I clenched my teeth as I stared into the darkness.

There was no long wait. I had barely hidden myself when someone knocked at the door of the room, paused for a reply, knocked again, and entered. Two men came in, the faint light from the hall beyond showing up their uniformed figures.

'This isn't the room; it's all in darkness,' said one in a deep bass voice.

'Yes, it is; it's the library,' said the other, who evidently knew the house. 'Are you there, General? Did you call?'

They both waited for an answer, and, getting none, came further into the room.

'It can't be it,' said the first speaker.

'Better get a light,' returned the second. 'I know it is the right room.'

'Well, it's devilish odd.' Fumbling in his pocket, he got a match, struck it and held it up, glancing round the room with the faint, flickering light held above his head.

'Here's a lamp,' said his companion; 'hot too, only just put out. I don't like this. Where can the General be?'

'Better mind what we're doing, Loixoff. The General won't thank us to come shoving our noses into his affairs.'

'You heard the scream for help, Captain?'

'Yes, but it wasn't the General's voice,' returned the Captain dryly. 'And he was alone with the woman we were to take prisoner afterwards.'

They were lighting the lamp when this little unintentional revelation of old Kolfort's intended treachery to the Countess Bokara was made.

At that moment I felt my prisoner move, and I pressed my hand tightly over his mouth and held him in a grip that made my muscles like steel, lest he should struggle, and, by the noise, bring the men upon us.

When they had lighted the lamp they stood looking round them in hesitation. From where they stood the body of the dead woman was concealed by the table.

'The General's been here,' said the man who had been addressed as Loixoff. 'Here are his cap and gloves.' They lay not far from the lamp. 'What had we better do?'

My prisoner made another movement then and drew a deep breath through his nostrils, and I felt his arm begin to writhe in my grip. I slipped my revolver into my belt for a moment, lifted him up in my arms, holding him like a child, put his legs between mine while I pinioned him with my left arm so that he could not move hand or foot, and moved my right hand up to cover both nostrils and mouth. I would stifle his life out of him where he lay rather than let him betray me.

I could understand the men's hesitation. Old Kolfort was

certain to resent any interference or prying on their part into his secrets, and they foresaw that the consequences to them might be serious if they were to do what he did not wish. He knew how to punish interlopers. They were afraid, and I began to hope that, after all, I should yet get out of this plight if I could only keep my prisoner quiet.

Even if I had to kill him I could still get the paper I had come for; and as no one would know of my visit to the house, no glint of suspicion would ever fall on me. At this thought I almost hoped he would die.

The two men stood in sore perplexity for a time that seemed an hour to me, but may have been a couple of minutes, and then the elder one, the Captain, said:

'We'd better look through the other rooms.'

'As you please,' said his companion, and he turned away while the Captain picked up the lamp.

'I can't understand it,' he muttered.

'Perhaps we'd better not try,' said Loixoff. As he spoke he started, and I saw him stare at the spot where the Countess lay. 'By God! Captain, there's the woman, dead!'

They crossed the room together, and while the Captain held the lamp down close to the body Loixoff examined it.

'It's that fiend, Anna Bokara,' he cried. 'Now we know what that scream meant.'

'Is she dead?'

'Yes; here's a knife thrust right through her heart. There's no pulse,' he added after a pause. 'Is this his work?'

'It must be,' returned the Captain; and I saw them look meaningly into each other's eyes.

'We'd best clear out of this,' said the Captain. 'I suppose it's only a case of suicide after all,' he added significantly.

'Probably,' was Loixoff's dry answer as he rose from his knees. 'Where's the General, do you think?'

'I never think in these cases,' and the Captain put the lamp down, taking care to find the exact spot where it had stood, and then extinguished it. 'We'll wait till he calls us, Loixoff. And mind, not a word that we've been here. Leave the General to make his own plans.'

They went out, closing the door softly behind them, and I heard them leave the house. As I pushed open the doors of the cabinet again their steps crunched on the gravel outside as they walked away down the drive.

I breathed freely once more. I was safe so far, and in the relief from the strain of the last few terrible minutes my muscles relaxed, and I leant against the wall with scarcely sufficient strength to prevent my companion from slipping out of my arms to the floor.

But there was still much to be done, and I made a vigorous effort to pull myself together. I relit the lamp, but placed it so that no gleam of the light could be seen through the windows. Then laying my prisoner, who had fainted again as the result of my rough treatment of him in the hiding-place, on a couch, I secured the paper of the route I was to take to the frontier.

Next I applied myself vigorously to restore him to consciousness. I dashed cold water in his face, and then getting brandy from a cupboard in the room, I poured some down his throat, and bathed his forehead. The effect was soon apparent; his breathing became deeper and more regular, until with a deep-drawn sigh he opened his eyes and stared at me, at first in a maze of bewilderment, but gradually with gathering remembrance and recognition.

'You'll do now, General; but you've had a near shave. If I hadn't come in the nick of time that woman's knife would have been in your heart,' I said.

He started, and terror dilated his pupils as he glanced wildly about him.

'You're safe from her. She's killed herself. Drink this;' and I gave him more brandy. As I handed it to him he started again and stared at the blood on my hand. He was still scared enough for my purposes. He drank the brandy, and it strengthened him, and presently he struggled and sat up.

I drew out my revolver, made a show of examining it to make sure that it was loaded, and put it back in my pocket. I had run my hands over him before to make certain that he had no weapon.

'What are you going to do?' he asked, with a glance of fresh terror.

'Not to use that unless you force me,' I said, with a look which he could read easily enough. 'As soon as you're ready to listen I've something to say.'

He hid his face behind his trembling hands in such a condition of fright that I could have pitied him had it not been necessary for me to play on his fears. He sat like this in dead

silence for some minutes, and I waited, thinking swiftly how to carry out the plan I had formed.

'What is it you want?' he asked at length.

'You came here to-night to meet the Countess Bokara in the belief that she could put into your hands such papers as would give you an excuse to have me put to death, and when she had done it you meant to have had her arrested. Instead of that you fell into her trap, and she was on the point of killing you when I interfered and saved your life. Then she turned on me and struggled to kill me in order that she might carry out her purpose. Her failure drove her insane, and in her frenzy of baulked revenge she plunged the knife into her own heart. You will therefore write out a statement of these facts while they are still fresh in your mind, sign it, and give it to me.'

I pointed to my table, on which I had laid the writing materials in readiness. He was fast recovering his wits, if not his courage, and he listened intently as I spoke. I saw a look of cunning pass over his face as he agreed to what I said, and crossed to the writing-table. He thought he could easily disown the statement, and had been quick to perceive the use he could make of the facts against me. But he did not know the further plan I had, and he wrote out a clear statement exactly as I had required.

'Seal it with your private seal,' I said when he had signed it, his handwriting throughout having been purposely shaky. He would have demurred, but I soon convinced him I was in no mood to be fooled with. 'Your seal can't be disowned as a forgery,' I said pointedly. 'And now, as your hand has recovered its steadiness, you can write this again—this time, if you please, so that no one can mistake it;' and while he did this I watched him closely to prevent a similar trick.

'Good!' I exclaimed when all was finished. The second paper he had written I folded up carefully and placed in my pocket; the first I laid inside the dress of the dead woman, in such a position that anyone finding the body must see the paper.

'That will explain what has happened when the body is found,' I said dryly. 'I want the facts made very plain.' He looked at me with an expression of hate and fear and cunning combined.

'I must go; I am not well,' he said.

'We are going together, General,' I returned quietly. 'I am willing to assume that you are so grateful to me for having saved

your life, that in turn you wish to secure my safety. You have had me arrested once, your men have treated me like a felon, you have filled the roads with your agents until I cannot take a step without further fear of instant capture, and up to this moment you have sought my life with tireless energy ; but now you are so concerned for my safety, so eager to repair your mistaken estimate of me, and heedful for my welfare, that you are going to see me safe to the Servian frontier. That is the part you are cast for ; and, listen to me, if you refuse, if you give so much as a sign or suggestion of treachery, if you don't play that part to the letter, I swear by all I hold sacred I'll scatter your brains with this pistol ;' and I clapped it to his head till the cold steel pressed a ring on his temple. 'Now what do you say ?'

He cowered and shrank at my desperate words, and all the horror and fright of death with which the Countess Bokara had filled his soul came back upon him again as he stared helplessly up at me. His dry bloodless lips moved, but no sound passed them ; he lifted his hands as if in entreaty, only to drop them again in feeble nervelessness ; and he shook and trembled like one stricken with sudden ague.

'You value your life, I see, and you can earn it in the way I've said. So long as I am safe you will be safe, and not one second longer. That I swear. If there is danger on the road for me it is your making, and you shall taste of the risks you order so glibly for others. Every hazard that waits there for me will be one for you as well. You are dealing with a man you have rendered utterly reckless and desperate. Remember that. Now, do you agree ?'

'Anything,' he whispered, in so low a tone that I could only catch it with difficulty.

'Then we'll make a start. Come first with me.' I led him upstairs to my dressing-room, and made him wait while I exchanged the uniform I was wearing for a civilian's dress, and shaved off my beard and moustache. He sat watching me in dead silence, his eyes following my every action, much like a man spellbound and fascinated. I had saturated him through and through with fear of me, till his very brain was dizzy and dimmed with terror.

When my hasty preparations were finished, I took him down to the shooting-gallery while I armed myself with a stout sword-stick of the highest temper, testing the blade before him, and took a plentiful supply of ammunition for my revolver. I kept absolute

silence the whole time, letting the looks which I now and again cast on him tell their own story of my implacable resolve. He was like a weak woman in his dread of me, and at every fierce glance of mine he started with a fresh access of terror.

When all was ready for my start, I drew the plan of my route from my pocket and studied it carefully.

'I am ready,' I said; 'and now mark me. You will call up one of your men. What is that Captain's name who is here with you?'

'Berschoff,' he answered, like a child saying a lesson.

'You will call up Captain Berschoff and order him to draw off his men, and to send your carriage, unattended mind, up to the front door. You will be careful that the Captain does not see me. When the carriage comes, you will order your coachman to drive you as fast as he can travel to the village of Kutscherf. While you are speaking to Captain Berschoff my hand will be on your shoulder and my revolver at your head, and if you dare to falter in so much as a word or syllable of what I have told you, that moment will be your last on earth. Come!'

I held my revolver in hand as we left the gallery and went to the door of the house.

My breath came quickly in my fast-growing excitement, for I knew that a moment would bring the crisis on the issue of which all would turn. When once I had got rid of his men, his sense of helplessness would be complete, and my task would be lighter. But my fear was that in his cunning he might even dare to play me false in the belief that I should be afraid to make my threat good. He knew as well as I that to shoot him right in front of his captain would be an act fraught with consummate peril for me.

My heart beat fast as I unfastened the heavy door, opened it, and turning gripped him by the shoulder as he went forward on to the step and called to Captain Berschoff.

Then I pulled him back, closed the door to within a couple of inches, and, planting my foot to prevent it being opened wider, I pressed the barrel of the pistol to his head, as we stood listening to the hurried footsteps of the approaching officer.

(To be concluded.)

At the Sign of the Ship.

MISS GRIFFITHS contributed to the last number of this magazine an amusing list of schoolboy blunders. A few are capable of explanation. The lad who said that shoddy was an Irish beverage probably meant toddy. The youth who thought that a watershed is a shed for keeping water in must have been ill taught. I remember being bored with Physical Geography (Hughes's) when about thirteen. A watershed I conceived to be a dark cavern, like a cart-shed at home, that 'rolled the torrent out of dusky doors.' Nobody can have explained to me that 'shed' meant parting or division, otherwise I could not have formed this mental picture of a watershed. But, indeed, the explanation may have been given, for I was cursed with 'the malady of not marking.' The answer about Roman citizenship, 'a ship on which the Romans went out fishing free of charge,' is probably an example of sheer 'cheek.'

* * *

If we could only examine grown-ups, I believe they would, as a rule, prove as ignorant as the boys. I have seen a paper of General Information set by a man who did not know the answers himself, as I found out when I tried him in *viva voce*. Before me lies a General Paper set at a public school, with the answers of a youth of fourteen summers. *He* did not know what place is called 'Paddy's Milestone,' nor do I know. He knew 'French leave,' but not Dutch courage, Irish bull, Welsh rabbit, Parthian shafts, Sicilian Vespers, Greek calends, Roman candle, or castle in Spain. He knew almost all nautical questions, except one about Sir Richard Grenville's ship, the *Revenge*. He knew Man Friday, but not one other literary character out of twenty. Of John Silver, Tony Lumpkin, Dr. Primrose, Alan Breck, Front de Boeuf, Becky Sharp, Mr. Jingle, and so forth, he had never heard. I dare say he never will be better informed. Gavin Dishart bowled *me* out; yet it was proved on me that I had read about him.

Picture writing in Egypt he defined as *Heliographs*, but scratched his answer out. He averred that Pascal invented a cure for hydrophobia—rather a natural blunder in a boy. He was right about John Wesley, but never heard of Arthur Wellesley. He called Marston Moor ‘the name of a battle in Invernessshire.’ He knew who wrote *Monte Cristo*, but knew not who wrote *Faust*, the *Inferno*, the Koran, or *Coriolanus*. He had neither heard of Gilbert and Sullivan nor of Harmodeus and Aristogeiton. He knew Eyre and Spottiswoode, not Besant and Rice. He only knew one out of twenty terribly familiar quotations. He said that ‘the wisest fool in Christendom’ was Henry VIII. He knew who is Sirdar (I did not), but not who is Pope or Poet Laureate. Another lad, asked ‘Who is Bishop of Canterbury?’ answered, ‘Mr. and Mrs. Temple.’ The first boy—oh, shame!—did not know who is captain of the Gloucestershire Eleven! This was a boy of common or average ignorance, and I greatly doubt if he will ever much increase his stock of general information, or be much the worse for the want thereof. I lately met a First Class man, a don of eminence, who had not heard of two literary gentlemen, still happily among us, whose names are widely blazoned in all newspapers. But I shall not offend their feelings by giving the names of which my erudite friend had never heard.

* * *

Surely philosophers ought to devote more attention to that singular fact in human nature, the development of unselfishness. That the weaker goes to the wall, that the strong grab whatever they can get, is the law through every form of life, till you reach mankind. Mr. Huxley, in an essay on ‘Evolution and Morals,’ remarked that man, when unselfish, when careful of the weak, and when self-denying, reverses the ‘cosmic process.’ But why does he do so? This question haunts me, and woke up yesterday when I was watching two garden cats being fed. Equal dishes of milk were set down, one on either side of a hedge. Each cat left his own dish, came through the hedge, and appropriated the dish of the other cat. Thus they played an amusing game till the milk was finished. Each puss thought that the other puss’s dish must be the better.

* * *

St. Augustine, in his *Confessions*, gives a similar illustration of Original Sin. He had seen twins taking their natural nourish-

ment, and remarked that one scowled upon and thrust away the other, though, of course, he had no more to gain by it than the two cats. Still the naughty babe was full of the worst passions of selfishness. We see them wherever a sparrow has a big crumb of bread, wherever a big trout has a convenient place for securing food. He drives away any little trout that comes near him. The reverse only occurs, I fancy, where the maternal passion is engaged. A homeless cat dwelt in my tiny garden: her kittens were cherished by a neighbour. But when we fed the outcast puss she jumped over the wall, and carried her fish to her prosperous kittens. Here was Altruism: the poor helping the rich, but the rich were her children.

* *

That unselfishness is not the law, in civilised society, but the exception to the law, we know very well. On the other hand a large body of evidence proves that, in savage society, the weak and the young receive their due share in a communistic way. Dampier noted this, two hundred years ago, in our earliest account of the savages of Australia, and I have elsewhere collected plenty of testimony to a similar rule of unselfishness, extending beyond the group of kindred, among very low savages. In Mr. Tylor's manual, 'Anthropology,' a trustworthy report will be found, exceptions being also noted—among lower barbarians chiefly. The school of Rousseau regarded savages as existing in a state of nature, a blessed thing. But, as far as this unselfishness goes, the said savages are *not* in a state of nature. They act unlike the cats and other animals which we have been considering. They run counter to the cosmic process, and, as long as they do so, they cannot advance in civilisation. 'That is the pathetic part of it.' There is no advance without accumulation of private property, and that accumulation cannot exist under pristine unselfishness. But why are low savages so unselfish, so remote from the ways of the lower animals? People answer that it is found to be good for the group, but that is not the case. The group would thrive, conquer, and prosper if it evolved distinctions of rank, property, and slavery. Thus do conquering races arise, and dominate unselfish tribes. Where is the origin, then, of the early communism which flies in the face of the cosmic process? Hazlitt wrote, but nobody ever read, a book to prove that mankind was naturally (we should rather say unnaturally) disinterested. Perhaps he is right; but why, I repeat, is early man so different from other animals, and, on the whole, from civilised man? And how is civilised man

to return to savage equality, without ceasing to enjoy the advantages (for there are some) of civilisation? Such are the problems suggested by the two cats with their two equal dishes of milk.

* * *

As every well-informed Englishman knows, the Free Kirk of Scotland has united itself with the United Presbyterian Kirk of the same country. The latter was thought by Mr. Disraeli to have been the creation of the Jesuits, but then the same thing was popularly rumoured about the Covenant some two hundred and seventy years ago. It would ill become me to presume to understand what the differences were between these two seceding bodies, both of which, I understand, claim to be more like John Knox's notion of an authentic Kirk than the present Established Kirk. All of them seem to have fallen back into the original sin of the kist o' whustles, or organ, a thing obnoxious to strict reformers and earnest professors of the old school.

* * *

These left-hand backslidings and right-hand fallings off are not equally agreeable to all the children of the Free Kirk. A friend tells me of an instructive conversation with an old Free Kirk woman on one of the islands. She was anxious to get rid of the U. P. brethren, and comminated Principal Rainey, who engineered the Union, cutting him off from the Church and handing him over to Satan, as precious Mr. Cargill did to Charles II. She was great on the Blessed Disruption and the Declaration Act; but she was greater on the ancient local Saint, whose name, I think, was St. Malise. An old effigy of this pious man is kept, it seems, outside the walls of the bloated and Erastian Established Kirk, a new building. It had long existed in the parish kirk before the Disruption, and was much respected in the parish. But, at the Disruption, the islanders having joined the Free Kirk, the older building was dismantled, and the Established, or Auld Kirk, party collared the statue of the saint, much to the chagrin of the Free Kirkers.

* * *

All this is very odd, for the image is undeniably an 'idol,' and the Reformers and Covenanters would have turned it into road metal, had they got hold of it. Yet here we find both sects of Presbyterians quarrelling over the ownership of the venerable but idolatrous object.

* * *

Not as an object of art, nor as a relic of antiquity, but as a fine potent fetish is the idol valued. His stone legs are broken. They were broken, said the Free Kirk old woman, in the following manner: A young man, who had been helping to carry a coffin to burial in recent days, lost his temper because it was so heavy. He struck the legs of the saint with a staff in a passion, and cracked them. That very night, as he walked home, he fell over a cliff and broke his own legs. After twelve centuries, after all the changes in religion, the Celtic saint of the ancient faith could still take his own part and avenge his own injuries, like other saints in Catholic legend.

* * *

That is not all. As the nocturnal traveller passes the Established Kirk, which has secured the holy effigy, 'he will be hearing awful knockings. And they say—but what will they not say?—that the knockings are the doings of St. Malise, for 'he does na like his new quarters.' So the aged Free Kirk dame declares, with a thin pretence of scepticism. St. Malise has fallen to spirit-rapping, —a bad descent—but he is still active. Thus the very ideas which the Reformers most detested, and tried to eradicate by destroying all remains of ecclesiastical art, are still vivacious in this delightfully archaic island, *not* among Catholics, but in the bosom of that singular savoury professor Mrs. MacSomething. Like Meg Dodds, in the case of St. Ronan, she would probably say that St. Malise was 'nane of your idolatrous Romans, but a Chaldee, which, to be sure, is a far other story.' By 'Chaldee' Mrs. Dodds is believed to have intended 'Culdee,' the Culdees being regarded, by a pious fiction, as a sort of primitive Free Kirkers. Probably St. Malise (if that really is his name) was a sort of Columban missionary. He is still a lively fetish, which argues great vitality. A more charming example of survival in religion cannot be found in the learned works of Mr. Tylor.

* * *

Possibly St. Mun, the patron saint of the burial island opposite Balachulish, is reponsible for the mysterious lights on the isle and on the hill-side opposite. They were very lively in August, when a Sassenach friend of mine, with half the village, observed them running along the level loch-side, climbing the hill, and then returning to the water's edge. My friend could form no theory of these mysterious flames, which the villagers attribute to the post-

humorous agency of a laird of no distant date. That hypothesis appears superfluous, but it is to be wished that some meteorologist would examine the real nature of these lights in a place as dry and devoid of marsh as any Highland place can well be. They look like carriage lamps, but carriages (and bicycles) do not climb steep and pathless hills. They are equally visible to everybody on the other side of the loch ; but when some bold spirits rowed across they could see nothing of the phenomena. I doubt they did not wait very long. The lights were said to have ceased after the burning of some papers in which the laird was thought to be interested, but *that* theory no longer holds the ground.

* * *

Here is a popular etymology new to me. Near the town of St. Boswell's, on the Waverley line, is a property called Lesudden, or Alesudden. The town itself is named from St. Bosail, who received St. Cuthbert into religion at Old Melrose. Now the public believes that the saint died very abruptly in his cell near the place. Hence the place name Alesudden—'All o' a sudden.' In the same way a *mell*, or hammer, and a rose are carved on the stone of Melrose Abbey. The real name is Mailross, *ross* being the Gaelic for a promontory, on which Old Mailross or Melrose originally stood. But the Gaelic has passed almost wholly away from the names of places on the border, save in the cases of some hills and rivers. Another Scotch popular etymology derives marmalade from *Marie malade*, Queen Mary having partaken of the delicacy when sea-sick on her voyage from France. But *marmalet* is the real word, and marmalade was an article of commerce long before the queen left fair France. By the way many correspondents trace 'snob' for shoemaker or cobbler deep into last century, and it is found, though I knew it not, in many dictionaries. The origin of the word, and of its modern meaning, as in Thackeray's use, remain obscure, and now *snobbisme* has found its way into the language of Molière. Odd fortunes of words !

* * *

What can interest the historian (if I may call myself, unworthy, by so revered a name) more than to find a MS. diary of his own great-great-great grandmother, for the period 1715-1756? And what, alas ! can disappoint him more than to discover that the excellent lady recorded nothing but the ups and downs of her own spiritual experiences? She seems to have

been a rather belated Covenanter, for in 1715-1756 she frequently renewed her 'personal covenant' with her Maker. About *moral* deeds and misdeeds she confesses nothing, except that once she spoke sharply to her servants. The experiences are as mystical, miracles apart, as those of St. Theresa. Public affairs are only touched on in the year of grace 1745, when the diarist took no part in sewing on white or black cockades, but humbled herself in the general fast which the Kirk decreed as soon as Prince Charles crossed the Border. My venerable kinswoman wrote a much better hand, and spelled infinitely more correctly, than that hero. In fact she rather discredits the idea that Scottish women, in the last century, were very badly educated. The wife of Mackintosh, who rode at the head of her branch of Clan Chattan in 1746, was a great lady, but utterly unable to spell, and most of the Highland chiefs were very little better. My Covenanting kinswoman, on the other hand, was only the wife of a Teviotdale Dandie Dinmont, whose family old Satchells kindly assures of their 'gentrice,' or gentle blood, for Paris of Troy, also, was a shepherd swain. It is probable that the Lowlanders were much better educated than the Highlanders, even of the higher classes.

* * *

The Covenanting style of theology would last longest in remote places, like Teviotdale, while, in the towns, the clergy had become 'Moderates,' played cards, and were a kind of correct Pagans, like old Dr. Carlyle of the 'Autobiography.' Even now, in one or two remote agricultural villages, we find congregations of 'Auld Lichts,' the remnant of the Original Secession Kirk. Their ways are exactly like those described by Mr. Barrie in his *Auld Licht Idylls*. They have great difficulty in getting a minister, who, when found, is obliged to vow to maintain conventicles, at his ordination. The imposition of hands is maintained, though John Knox desired to get rid of a practice observed by the Apostles, being more anxious to differ from Rome than to agree with the Apostles. The Auld Lichts, lately, got hold of a Cameronian minister, but found him insufficiently orthodox. Most of the few that remain, and forswear organs, are in the north of Ireland. In politics they are anti-Burghers; but, in Ireland, are probably Unionists, out of an objection to the Roman pravity. Their congregations are now, perhaps, alone among Presbyterians in sturdily resisting the 'Kist o' Whustles,' or organ.

* * *

Has the reader observed that, in modern houses, 'with every modern improvement and convenience,' one ancient convenience is missing? There are no shutters, but human nature, with its habit of survivals, has introduced sham shutters, with handles, shutters which do not shut: mere decorative rudiments, like the buttons which button nothing, on the tails of our coats. Moreover modern blinds, on windows, are usually white, or pink, so as to let in and intensify the morning light. These facts appear to prove that most householders have good consciences, and are sound sleepers, but a person whose sleep is insecure sadly misses the shutters of our ancestors. However that hateful thing the 'Venetian blind' of green slats of wood, which tumbles down with a crash, and, when pulled up, makes an angle across the window, and lets in more light than it excludes, and gets jammed like a machine gun, is only found in early Victorian houses. A soft dark-blue blind is almost as good as shutters, and infinitely better than rose-pink blinds, which are almost meretricious. My dear old shutters helped to deaden the noise of crowing cocks, half-awakened birds, yelping dogs, and dissipated nightingales. But shutters, in modern houses, are past praying for. Our Anglo-Saxon ancestors must have been civilised enough to use them, for the celebrated palisade at the battle of Hastings was made out of *fenestras*, which I take to be shutters, not window-frames. Mr. Horace Round, to be sure, declines to hear of the palisade which was accepted by Mr. Freeman. But I learn that the shade of a Norman who fought at Hastings has recently appeared to a descendant, and dictated a long and minute account of the battle. A friend who has read the manuscript is not certain, but rather inclines to believe that the palisade was described fully by the heroic spectre, and, if so, I dare say that Mr. Round will abandon his objections, in deference to 'spectral evidence.' This would be a triumph for Mr. Freeman and his party.

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The late Mr. Eric Mackay must have been very young, in outward aspect, for his age. This I infer from a letter of Miss Corelli's, in the *Academy*. Miss Corelli says that Mr. Mackay did not come within her knowledge till his return from Italy to England, at the age of forty-five, when 'more than half of his life' had been lived. He certainly was under ninety at his death. On his arrival, *aetat* xlv., from Italy, Miss Corelli was a child of twelve. The interval cannot well be less than fifteen

years, judging from the number of Miss Corelli's novels, and the strenuous thought and studious labour which they imply. On these lines Mr. Mackay must have been at least fifty-five at the time of his decease. Now I saw him more than once, and certainly he was by far the youngest-looking man of fifty-five that I ever beheld: I should have estimated him to be much my junior. Not yet have I read what the spirit of Miss Corelli saith to the Churches, in the romance, or apocalypse, which combines the titles of Mr. Zangwill's *The Master* and Mr. Caine's *The Christian*, as if one should call a book *The Bride of Ivanhoe*. But the clergy of several denominations are about, it is announced, to deliver judgment on the Message, which, I trust, will escape the censure of the Congregation of Rites and of the Index Expurgatorius. Indeed the Index seldom troubles books written in our English language, and reserves its blunders for Continental heretics like Alexandre Dumas, of all people. Why the orthodox should be prevented from reading *The Three Musketeers* (which does not deal with theology) puzzles the orthodox themselves.

* * *

It is almost a safe way to success, an attack, in fiction, on the clergy. They get excited, preach sermons, and unwisely advertise the peccant volume. They ought to be less sensitive. Solicitors, baronets, earls, and minor poets have long been the recognised butts of novelists. Yet solicitors suffer meekly; the Order of Baronets (if it is an 'order') holds its peace; the peers are 'more than usual calm,' and the minor poets 'do not give a single' expletive when novelists rage against them. The ministers of religion ought to imitate this dignified tranquillity, even when censured by the inspired Miss Corelli. But we cannot teach worldly prudence to our ghostly counsellors—they *will* rush into print.

ANDREW LANG.

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